How ESL students perceive their online learning experiences

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Abstract

Online learning has been popular among Chinese youngers and this kind of learning is going to be more and more welcomed in China. In the learning environment that technology supports, how learners feel of their online learning process and how instructors could do to help learners to adapt to online learning have become important researching filed in education. Therefore, in the context of online learning, this present study is going to contribute to studies dedicated to exploring learners' online learning experiences and to find how online learners perceive the online learning process. The objective of this study is to identify how online learners perceive online learning, what do they like from online learning and what challenges they face in online learning process in order to explore and give brief description on learners' online learning experiences. For the purpose of exploring learners' online learning experiences, qualitative method is used in this study and qualitative data is collected by interviewing people who has had online learning experiences before. All these qualitative data are recorded and then transacted into textual data. The results defined dimensions of ESL learner's online learning experiences: the issues of learning skills, the issues of learning emotion, the issues of interaction, the issues of learning environment, the issues of technology and the issues of instructor. Four types of challenges online learners face and support online learners expect were also discovered. According to the findings, the inspirations for online instruction and learning are provided: (a) to encourage online learners to be active in learning process, (b) to increase interactions between instructors and peers, (c) to provide technological help if needed, (d) to support meta cognitive strategies and (e) to promote language scaffolding.

Keywords: online learning; learning experience; learning challenges; learning support; exploration and description

Introduction

With the development of internet technology and its rapid advancement of this technology, lots of companies and institutions begin to give online courses to their students. Especially in China, owing to students' big population and hard studying pressure, there are not enough learning resources for every student. Therefore, lots of students take online courses to achieve their learning goals. According to the survey of Chinese government, more than half of the total students in China have taken online courses and think online courses do well to their study. This kind of online learning supported by internet technology encourages learners' life-long learning and gives them more opportunities to learn different courses (Finn, Rajeswaran, Kakade and Levine, 2019). Since more and more students begin to take online courses, it is essential to pay attention to this field. Especially for Chinese students, when they choose to take courses from foreign countries, they always face language obstacle besides leaning problem. There is need to explore ESL students online learning experiences.

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However, online learning and online instruction are new emerging areas and there are few studies paying attention to learners' online learning experiences (Peggy, Sheila, Susan and Robert, 2014). Therefore, in order to understand how students perceive their online learning experiences, this study explored online learners' perceptions on their online learning process and to find the challenges of online learners in their online learning in order to help them to meet their learning needs and to help instructors to strengthen their instruction.

Literature Review

In this Time of Crisis, online learning is famous around the world and it is essential to pay attention to online learners' learning experiences. Especially for nonnative English speakers, they might face language problem when they learn courses taught in English. Therefore, in this part, studies in online learning, ESL students and online learning experiences will be introduced.

Online Learning

The most important feature of online learning is that it delivered courses using the internet and students don't have face-to-face talk with their teachers (Hiatt et al. 2018; Gleason and Greenhow 2017). Owning to the purpose of this study, the advantages and weaknesses will be stated in this part.

The advantages of online learning are obvious. Online learning is popular because of its professional development offering, the flexibility it offers, less distractions and equality offered to students (Nguyen, 2015; Xu and Jaggers 2013; Bowen et al. 2013). For online learners, taking online courses is more cost-effective, they don't need to pay for the accommodations and other costs. For the institutions giving online courses, online learning is more time-effective and require less administration costs (Finn, Rajeswaran, Kakade and Levine, 2019). The flexibility online learning supports is also important reason why it could attract students. For most online courses, they allow learners to engage in learning and to have interactions anytime and anywhere, and learners don't need to show in their institutions (Bowen et al. 2014). In the survey of Bowen (2013), students' learning satisfaction was studied in the context of online learning, hybrid learning and traditional learning. They found that learners in the online learning environment tend to be more satisfied with their learning process, and this is because there is less distractions in the context of online learning (Bowen et al., 2013). Similarly, Bowen, Chingos, Lack and Nygren (2013) also claimed that online learners gave better grades than the students learning in the face-to-face courses. However, this statement is not agreed by Motti and Sanders (2014). They stated that there is no significance difference in the grade averages between the students taking online courses and the students in the traditional classes. Besides these advantages online learning gives, online students' critical thinking skills, motivation and commitment to learning are also improved (Donnelly,

2010). The environment of online learning requires students to be more self-regulated and encourages them to be life-long learning, this does good to students' critical thinking and appeals them to involve in and commit to learning voluntarily. Owing to these features and advantages online learning could support, learners have more opportunities to access learning resources and also to complete their study. According to Yeboah and Smith (2016), the most reason that online learning is growing popular around the world is that online learning gives flexibility to learners to take courses in their pace. In this learning context, students are able to achieve individual learning and life-long learning (Nguyen, 2015).

However, obstacles also emerged from online learning. The issue with social presence and less connected with peers and teachers is big problem for teachers and learners (Gleason and Greenhow, 2017). Lovern and Lovern (2013) stated that lacking of teacher presence and peers interactions, online learners felt less connected and this has impacted their online learning experiences. These learners agreed that the connection and interaction with their instructors and peers play important role in their online experiences. Lack of inspection from their teachers and the pressure form their peers, online learners are more likely to withdraw from online courses than the conventional courses (Lovern and Lovern, 2013). Because online learners are not monitored by their instructors, they are also more likely to cheat in online learning process (Moten, et al., 2013). In the online assessment, the cheating practices consist plagiarism by not citing and purchasing answers. These cheating actions do no good to students' assessment and knowledge learning. Besides these, the technical obstacles also appear. Both instructors and learners spend more time on solving technical issues and they are struggling with the complexed online learning technology. The study of Xu and Jaggars (2013) might give direct evidence on the obstacles online learning brings. In their study, instrumental technique was used to identify the differences in grades between online learners and students in face-to-face learning contexts. Therefore, the weaknesses of online learning could be grouped into less connections with instructors and peers, distractions and technical obstacles.

All these studies showed that the most shining feature of online learning is the learning environment it constructs. The online learning is flexible, motivative and cost-effective for learners. However, it also could be disconnected, less regulated and unfair. These studies could inspire us from what facets that learners' online learning experiences could be described.

ESL Students in course using English

It is important to understand ESL students' learning situation in courses that are taught in English, because this study tries to explore ESL students' online learning experiences. The ESL students are English second language students. The course they take are not delivered in their first language (Leki, 1991). According to Ashton-Hay et al (2016), when ESL students pursue their studies

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in western countries, lots of them face linguistic challenges. Take Chinese learners for example, because of the linguistic and academic challenges, Chinese students are not able to adapt to learning environment in western countries (Floyd, 2015). Among these challenges, the most obstacles ESL students face consist academic writing, group participation and the comprehension of lectures. Lots of ESL students admitted that they could not write appropriately in English because of the sequence of sentences and the structure of their writing. When they are writing, they feel it is not easy to find the proper word to express their meaning (Elliott and Zhang, 2019). For the group participation, the ESL students could not engage in the group work like group presentation and group learning (Elliott and Zhang, 2019). They explained that in group work, the native students and EFL students speak more and fluently, the ESL students just listened to these learners and had no chances to express their ideas. In English classes, especially in the group participation, the ESL students are passive audiences (Elliott and Zhang, 2019). Additionally, the ESL students are not confident with their accent so that they speak less (Derwing, 2003). All these mentioned issues involve in ESL students' cognitive and constructive situation (Goh and Foong, 1997). This means that the ESL students face big language obstacle in their learning. Furthermore, the comprehension of lectures is another challenge for ESL students. The ESL students complained that they just couldn't follow their instructors and always are not able to understand their instructors' accent (Yang, 2010).

All these studies mentioned took place in the face-to-face learning environment. In the face-to-face courses, even ESL students might face challenges in understanding lectures and participating in group work, they could still have other strategies to compensate these obstacles (Oxford, 2002). The ESL students could understand their instructors by body language and ask their instructors to repeat when they are not able to follow their instructors. Even the ESL students tend to be passive and inactive, the direct interaction with instructors and peers in face-to-face courses could still help these ESL students to engage in learning. In online learning however, things are not so smoothy. Besides these mentioned language obstacles, the ESL students face other language challenges. In online learning, the ESL students interact with instructors through screen and they feel that they could not hear their instructors clearly (Elliott and Zhang, 2019).

Therefore, the studies reflected that the less proficient language skills are associated with students' language obstacles both in face-to-face courses and online courses. However, it should be noted that owing to socio-economic changes, the attitudes of Chinese students also change. It is needed to do study on the paradox of Chinese students.

Students Perceptions of Online Learning Experiences

As for learners' online learning experiences, lots of studies have been done to identify how learners perceive their online learning process. It is shown that students from different regions have different attitudes. Comparing with the students from Japan, the students from western countries tend to be more satisfied with the online courses. Additionally, these online learners used several aspects to describe their learning experiences. They described their online learning experiences in the facets of the content and organization of online courses, the convenience and flexibility afforded by online learning, the online interaction, the instructors' roles, the features of technology and the technical support. Dixson (2010) claimed that in the environment with good interactions with their teachers and peers and enough appliance of knowledge, students could learn best. Additionally, the perceptions of learning environment and the level of technology ability are also important factors that influence learners' online learning experiences (Bowen, et al. 2014; Cechova et al., 2018). Students always described their online learning experiences that they are learning in the fiction world and they need to learn how to use internet technology. Also, learners felt that learning online is more effective and it is able to help them in increasing their technological literacy. After taking online courses, they are more confident with technology usage (Newbold, Mehta and Forbes, 2011).

According to the assessment of online students' learning experiences, Dixson (2010) utilized the existing instruments to explore online learners' perspectives and attitudes towards their online learning experiences in order to find how they learn in the online learning environment. In this study, Dixson (2010) highlighted the importance of online learning environment. Paying attention to students' perspectives on the aspects of learning environment and social interactions, Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson and Young (2014) developed the instruments exploring learners' experiences in the context of online learning. This instrument was created from Dixson's survey on students' engagement and several open-ended questions were added to ask students' opinions on the learning environment. After the analysis of data, online learners' experiences could be divided into 5 aspects comprising critical thinking assignments, instructional technology, engagement, interactions and responsibility.

All these studies have identified the factors that affect students' online learning experiences. According to Kenney et al (2005), students who could gain academic challenges and opportunities in engaging supportive environment tend to have good learning experiences in their online learning process. The continuing interactions with teachers and peers was found to be another factor that influencing students' learning experiences both in the conventional courses and in the online courses. Online learners perceive the interaction as the guarantee of academic quality (Britto and Rush, 2013).

Methodology

By interviewing twenty ESL learners on their online learning experiences, this study is quite descriptive and explorative to explore how learners' online learning looks like. The exploration of ESL learners' online learning experiences might inspire pedagogical practices and institutional decisions.

Method and Design

It is important to acknowledge that the quantitative methods are not free from limitations, in spite of the advantages. The survey instruments used in quantitative methods ask participants to choose options from the predetermined responses areas, this might not reflect the diversity of students' experiences and complex nature of online learning. Aiming to investigate the feelings and thoughts of ESL learners on their online learning experiences, this study is quite exploratory. Therefore, the qualitative method is appropriate to explore experience (Polit and Beck, 2010). The emphasize of this study is to better understand ESL students' online learning perceptions and to describe how these learners explain their online learning experiences. Therefore, qualitative method is used in this study and this study tries to compliment the findings from the quantitative studies on students' perceptions of their online learning experiences. To obtain better understanding of learners' online learning experiences, the interview is used to gain in-depth understanding of students' perceptions under the description.

After obtaining informed consent from all participants, it is ready for the interviews. All the interviews take place in the face-to-face setting, and the whole interview with every participant is recorded by mobile devices.

Interview Protocol

The participants were required to recall their online learning experiences of the following topics: (1) their perceptions of face-to-face courses and online courses, (2) challenges they face in online learning, and (3) support them expect in online learning. The opening questions were like "do you think what strengths and weaknesses online courses have" and the narrative questions were like "do you feel more challenged in an online course versus a face-to-face course" so that participants answer these questions to describe their online learning experiences.

The interview protocol consists five questions: 1. Have you ever taken online courses using English language before, and what course you have taken? 2. Do you think what strengths and weaknesses do online courses have? 3. comparing with face-to-face courses, think about those strengths and weaknesses. 4. Besides the online course itself, do you think the language used in the courses challenged you? Taking online courses in English language, do you feel more challenged in an online course versus a face-to-face course? 5. You have experience with taking courses online. What kind of support do you expect from your next online courses?

All these questions are used to explore students' perceptions of online learning so that describe their online learning experiences and to discover the challenges they face and the support they want.

Data Collection Process

The data was collected by inviting participant to join in the interviews in face-to-face context. The interviews consist two parts. In part one, every participant's personal data is collected comprising their age, subject and IELTS test scores. In part two, the learners' perceptions of online learning are explored using five questions. For identifying the concept of perception, three factors were used: impressions, interpretations and affective experiences (Fan, 2019). Accordingly, the five interview questions were divided into three types: students' perceptions of online learning comparing with face-to-face learning, students' interpretations of challenges they face and advantages in online learning, and their affective experiences of online learning process.

At first, the ethical clearance was obtained. All the participants are Chinese so the interviews are conducted in Chinese and every interview lasts for 20-35 minutes. All the interviews are recorded using mobile device and then transcribed. The interviews were conducted in the author's house where pleasant sofa and refreshments were offered to create pleasant atmosphere. Before the interviews, the participants were informed the purpose of the study and asked to fill the consent form. The participants were then promised that their participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw from the interview or reject to answer any questions. They were also promised that the study is anonymous. After interviews, the recording data was transacted into textual data and copy of transcript is sent to every participant for their verification. At last, translated into English, the transcripts are analyzed.

Data Analysis

After being transcribed into textual data, the data were coded according to the similar meaning. At first, I read the transcripts to be familiar with the data. Then, the text was coded by highlighting the sentences using color and assigning codes to them. The sentences with similar meaning were coded as the same codes. After the coding process, I came up with the initial codes. And then, the codes were grouped into categories, and the categories were grouped into themes. Totally there are 59 open codes. These codes were grouped into diverse categories. These categories were then grouped into six themes. According to these codes, four types of challenges that online learners face and four kinds of learning support that online learners expect also emerged. The details of the codes are provided in the chapter of findings.

Results

In the investigation of Yoon (2003), online learners' learning experiences were described in three dimensions: interactions with instructor, pedagogy design and technology comfort. Similarly, Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden (2009) also claimed these three factors as the key components of online learning experiences and added that the online learning environment is another component. As for students' online learning experiences, the results of this study were divided into six dimensions: the issues of learning skills, the issues of learning emotion, the issues of interaction, the issues of learning environment, the issues of technology and the issues of

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instructor.

Issues of Learning Skills

The participants were asked to think their online learning process comparing to the face-to-face learning. The results show that the issues of learning skills are key facet that online learners experience in their online learning process. Thirteen of the twenty participants mentioned the learning skills issues. For this theme, five categories emerged: concentrating skills, self-regulating skills, organizing skills, collaborating skills and language skills. Only seven participants mentioned the language obstacle, hence this study integrated the language issue into the issues of learning skills.

Contrast to the findings of Bowen (2013), four participants stated that there is *"more distraction"* in online learning context comparing with the conventional courses. According to these four participants, comparing with the conventional learning environment, being good at specific learning skill like concentrating skill is more essential in online learning process. Most of the participants thought that they were not able to monitor and regulate their learning process. Additionally, they felt that they lack of the learning skills for individual online learning skills. These skills involve in regulating and organizing their learning process.

> *"The online learning depends on individual learning mostly, however I couldn't concentrate on learning, because lots of messages popup form the computer and I am attracted by these popups…… I think that the strategies that help me concentrate on learning are needed"* (p1)

There are also participants mentioned collaborating skills. Because *"the online tasks are ambiguous"* and there is *"less guidance"* from instructors, they perceived that it is not as smoothy as in face-to-face course to work with peers in online learning context. Furthermore, several participants also mentioned the language challenges they faced in online learning. There are seven participants expressed that comparing with face-to-face courses, the online courses using the language of English are more challenging for them and this is because they are not able to "use instructors' body language" to understand the content. Interestingly, all these participants who were struggled with the language are the students whose IELTS score are 6.0 and these participants admitted that the "language skills are important" for online courses in English language.

> *"The online collaborations tasks are always ambiguous. I don't know what to do for collaboration and I also feel uncomfortable chatting with peers online because we didn't meet before. It feels like nobody pays attention on the group work and everyone just think that others will finish the whole work. In fact, I don't like this learning atmosphere."* (p9)

Issues of Learning Emotion

In line with the study of Roblyer and Wiencke (2004), it is suggested that the issue of learning emotion is the key component in students' online learning experiences. The results of this study suggest that the participants like taking online courses comparing with taking face-to-face courses. The reason why they like online courses is that all the participants in this study take the online courses voluntarily, these online courses are not compulsory courses for them. They take these online courses because of their intrinsic interests and learning motivation. This finding is similar with the study of Dixson (2010). Dixson stated that online learners are pleased with their online learning because their learning emotion and attitude towards online learning are energetic. Dixson also admitted that the issue of learning emotion is the key component needed to be highlighted in students' online learning process. In this study, the results suggest that online learners are interested in taking online courses because of their intrinsic interests. Others learnt online because of other motivation factor like company's requirements.

> *"I learnt computer science and the python computer language is not taught in the face-to-face class. However, when I look for job, it is required that I am able to write python codes. Therefore, I bought series of online courses teaching python and learnt it. I like these online courses because it helps me to satisfy the job requirements and these online courses are interesting. I felt that I was motivated by both the external interests and intrinsic interests."* (p5)

> *"In the face-to-face class, the courses are dull because I learn law and I just receive knowledge form instructors passively. In online learning however, lots of videos and movie clips are used*

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to explain the law principles and I am interested in these resources. I was attracted by these learning resources and found that it is not so dull even to learn law." (p16)

All in all, according to the issues of learning emotion, most of the participants in this study perceived that they are motivated in online learning. They think the learning resources are attractive and they feel comfortable in online learning process.

Issues of Interaction

The results of this study indicate that the issue of interaction is the key theme of online learning experiences. Almost every participant mentioned the interaction issues except the participant (p10) who doesn't like talking with others. Other participants either complained that there are less interactions in online learning process or explained that online learning tools provide more opportunities and methods to interact with others. This finding is similar with the findings of Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden (2009). In their study, they did investigation on students' online learning experiences. They found that there are four types of interacting patterns in online learning process: interactions with medium, interactions with learning environment, interactions with instructors and interactions with learning resources. Referring to the interacting patterns discovered by Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden (2009), this study divided this theme into three categories emerged: social interaction, emotional interaction and the interaction with instructor. Firstly, the social interaction with peers is improved in online learning environment. Thanks to the chatting tools provided by online technology, online learners perceive their social interactions with peers are *"more flexible"* and they could receive more emotional interaction in online learning process. According to the results, students obtain more emotional interactions in online learning like encouragement and praise.

"Owing to the online chatting tools, I am able to chat and interact with peers and instructors even after the courses. Because I need to type for chatting, it helps me to organize the sentences and the peers are able to understand me clearly." (p12)

However, not every participant received emotional interactions. As the participants criticized, even though the online technology provides chatting tools to them, they perceived there is less direct guidance from their instructors and they felt uncomfortable with that.

Issues of Learning Environment

Generally, participants have favorable impressions for online learning environment. They think the online learning environment is *"open and lively"* and the course design is more concise. As for this learning environment theme, there are three categories emerged: learning atmosphere, learning resources and interactions with learning environment. Firstly, online learners perceive that the learning atmosphere of online learning depends on the course design. They stated that their online instructors pay more attention on the course design to attract their attention and in order to improve their learning interests. However, there are also participants complaining that there is no fixed learning environment in online learning so that they perceive online learning is unstable. This finding could be supported by the study of Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden (2009). Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden admitted that because of learners' learning preferences, online learners' attitudes towards online learning environment varies. Several participants also mentioned the interactions with online learning environment. It is demonstrated that online learners have cognitive interactions with online learning environment (Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden, 2009). The links between learning websites support the connection of knowledge so that improve students' cognitive development.

"Because we are not in the same place when I am taking online courses, I feel that the instructors pay more attention on the construction of learning environment. The instructors try to give us real learning atmosphere so that they design the course using appropriate teaching strategies." (p12)

"In fact, when I am taking online courses in room facing the computer screen, I don't feel any learning environment. I even don't think that I am learning. In online learning environment, there is no encouragement of creative and critical thinking, I just receive the knowledge from the instructors." (p15)

The last category of this theme is the learning resources. Learning resource is key component of online learning environment. The key issue in this identified category involves in the types of resources and the quality of learning resources. The internet provides sufficient

learning resources to online learners. Online learners have access to various types of learning resources like audio resources and open resources. Most of the resources are selected by instructors to guarantee the quality of these learning resources (Shearer et al., 2019).

Issues of Technology

There is no doubt that online technology is the key component of online learning process. When the technology brings advantages to online learning, it also brings challenges to online learners and instructors (Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson and Young, 2014). In this technological theme, specific categories are divided into the technology utilization and students' comfort with online technology. According to participants' opinions, the online technologies help them to interact with their peers and the internet provides more learning resources to them. In online learning environment, technical skills are regarded as the pre-requisite for the success of online learning (Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden, 2009). Online learners admit that being familiar with diverse learning tools help them competent and capable in online learning. However, not every participant is satisfied with using online technology for learning. The technological challenges they face will be explained in next part specifically. The last technological category is students' comfort with online technology. Several participants are rid of *"opening accounts"* for learning software. And the internet quality is not stable. The quality of internet also affects their learning emotion (Raymond, Jacob and Lyons, 2016). Regardless these weaknesses of online technology, the online tools bring superiority (Shearer et al., 2019). The online tools help learners to post their ideas with less restriction and also provide interacting opportunities to online learners. The desirable features of online technology attract learners to be more active in online learning process (Shearer et al., 2019).

Issues of Instructor

The last theme suggests several practical inspirations to online instructors. There are five participants mentioning that they perceive their online instructors behave differently in online instruction. In the theme of instructor issue, three categories emerged: instructional methods, delivery methods employed and effectiveness of instructional strategies. Firstly, online learners agreed that the instructional methods used in online instruction are different with the methods used in the conventional courses (Shearer et al., 2019). In online learning, students perceive that "more teaching strategies were used" to enactive learners. The results of this study indicate that online learners perceive that their online instructors employed flexible and adjustable teaching strategy in online instruction. They think that comparing with the face-to-face courses, the online courses need instructors to use more teaching strategies to attract students (Shearer et al., 2019). Diverse delivery methods are also perceived by online learners. The last key category in this theme is the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Precise course

design and dynamic assessment guarantee the sufficiency of online instruction (Shearer et al., 2019).

> *"The online learning and teaching have typical characteristics comparing with the conventional courses. In the face-to-face courses, the instructors monitor the class and adjust their teaching pace according to the situations of students. In online learning environment however, I feel that instructors pay more attention on the course design because there are lots of unstable factors in online teaching."* (p14)

Discussion

According to the results mentioned before, online learners perceive their online learning experiences from the aspects of learning skills, learning emotion, interaction, leaning environment, technology and instructor. Accordingly five recommendations are suggested for online instruction in this section.

Encourage students to be active in learning process

From the section of findings in the former chapter, it is shown that most of the participants stated that they are not engaged in online learning and they are not motivation in joining in the online group work. Therefore, online instructors could encourage learners to participate in online learning activities and design courses that attract online learners (Li, 2019). Almost half of the total participants in this study complained that they are not motivated in online learning, and the reason is that the support and learning guidance they need is not immediate. In this sense, it is suggested that online instructors provide learning support immediately. However, this might bring more working pressure to instructors and give online instructors more workloads (Belshaw, Mackie, Phillips, Rodrigues and Russell, 2020). Available suggestion is that there could be teaching assistant in online courses to facilitate online instructors (Emily, 2019). It is also suggested to lessen online instructors' workloads and provide more teaching assistants to instructors by Fuertes, Graell-Martín, Fuentes-Loss and Balaguer-Fàbregas (2019). Additionally, other methods are also suggested by to encourage students' participation in online learning process. Furthermore, Emtinan (2020) stated that to engage students in online learning process, the instructors should provide learning strategies like reflective and integrating learning to students. According to Emily (2019), increasing students' intrinsic motivation is able to decrease online learners' withdraw rates.

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Increase interactions

Comparing with the conventional courses, the less connection with instructors and peers is another issue raised from the findings. It is obvious that in the face-to-face courses, students are connected with their instructors and peers so that their instructors are able to interpret students' actions and use these signals to adjust their instructing process. In online learning process however, the direct communication between instructors and students is not forthcoming. Therefore, more interactions are needed to create interesting and challenging learning environment for online learners. Additionally, because there are less face-to-face opportunities for online learners to interact with their teachers and peers so that they always feel isolated in their online learning process. Possible methods could be initiating online conferences, providing social interacting strategies, acknowledging students' achievement and monitoring students' interacting process. Besides the interactions involving verbal interaction, the sense of social community and belongings is needed to give online learners emotional support. The sense that they are part of the learning community encourages online learners participate in learning process and motivate them in the interactions directly (Bedford, 2019). Only after students perceive they should be responsible for this whole learning community, that they have intrinsic desire to engage in the learning experiences (Napier et al., 2011). Furthermore, the assessment could be another method to increase online learners' interaction. Besides the assessment from instructors, the judgement received from peers might bring peer pressure to learners so that learners are motivated to engage in the learning activities owing to the peer pressure (Bedford, 2019). For online learners, the assessments between peers create more opportunities for interactions between learners and learners. Therefore, to increase online interactions, instructors could provide more diverse interacting activities, develop learners' sense of belongings and extend learners' social skills and confidence.

Provide technological help

Technology has been integrated in the online learning environment. Because lots of different learning tools and online learning environment are used to deliver online courses, learners just felt that they are inundated with these technological issues and they need to learn how to use these tools before they started online learning. Several participants claimed that they felt these tools are time-consuming and they don't want waste their energy on these issues (Kristiawan and Muhaimin, 2019). Therefore, the scavenger activity might be needed to clean these technological obstacles away. Before the online courses begin, the activities that allow students to engage in the online tools and tutorial videos could be provided to students. Using online technology might also increases online instructors' workloads and hence decreases instructors' energy in preparing courses (Thorsteinsson, 2013; Rucker & Downey, 2016). Therefore, the institutions that provide online courses should also take the technological obstacles that instructors face into consideration. The technological help should also need to be provided to online instructors (Kristiawan and Muhaimin, 2019). Tutoring instructors before they using online instructing tools and adding more teaching assistants might help this obstacle.

Support metacognitive strategies

It is emphasized that providing students learning experiences that challenge their critical thinking skills is more important for online instruction than for face-to-face courses (Broadbent and Poon, 2015). In online learning process, it depends more on students' individual learning. This is because online learners receive less academic guidance form their instructors and rely more on their individual learning comparing with the students in face-to-face learning context. It is suggested to provide the overviews of how the session will be run to students. Under the guidance of session plan, online learners are able to understand and plan their learning procedure. According to Delen, Liew and Willson (2014), online learners' self-directedness and engagement skills interpret their online learning success. Supporting guidance and directions to students will help learners' learning process ((Moore and Kearsley, 2011). Jumaat and Tasir (2016) claimed that metacognitive support strategies are utilized in providing guidance and directing in online learning. For the aforementioned interaction issues, the metacognitive support strategies are also able to improve the quality of online interaction (Delen et al., 2014). Therefore, supporting metacognitive strategies to online learners to help them to regulate their learning process and adjust pace of study should be considered when online instructors giving lectures. Appropriate method could be designing metacognitive activities and asking online learners to reflect their learning critically. Blakey and Spence (1990) also stated that encouraging students to ask questions when they are learning is able to improve metacognition development of students. These questions could be the questions toward planning, the question toward monitoring and the questions toward assessing. The practices of planning, monitoring and assessing will help students to construct the organization of cognitive process and to improve learners' metacognitive awareness so that do good to quality of learning (Roll, Aleven, McLaren and Koedinger, 2011; Taub et al., 2014). Before the online courses, instructors could ask students to consider the topic of the week to evoke their prior knowledge. When giving lectures, instructors ask students to think whether they understand the subject or not. After courses, creating activities like reflecting on learning is able to help students to assess their online learning process. The study of Cigdem (2015) suggested that metacognitive tools like note-taking tool and tagging tool have the ability to help students' online learning process.

Promote language scaffold

The strategies described in this section needs almost no technological capacity, however it needs the support from both the instructors and upper administration. Because several participants expressed that they want online academic writing support, therefore, for online instructors, they could support online academic writing skills for students. For the upper administration, what they could do is to open online language courses for online learners, especially the ESL learners.

There are also other strategies to promote language scaffold. It is stated that to help with students' language skills, students' attitudes towards language learning is important (Kaewpet, 2009). As noted by Chuo (2004), students' success in language is prominently affected by their attitudes. Therefore, besides the support in language areas, helping students to engage in language learning is also important. In this case, online instructors could encourage learners to express their ideas using English in their learning process. When these online learners have the motivation to speak and use the language of English, they engage in this learning environment so that these learners will be familiar with the English online courses. For the support in online learners' academic writing, it is helpful to provide excellent samples of writing to students. In most cases, online learners could not understand the writing requirements in online learning comparing with the situation in the face-to-face learning. This is because in online learning, there is less opportunity for learners to receive direct language guidance. In this case, instructors should help students to plan and develop their writing process. Hence, providing excellent samples of writing will help online learners to better understand the course requirements and this imitation learning is also able to give inspiration for their writing. Additionally, it is also necessary to encourage online learners to invest more energy in selecting writing resources (Adzmi, 2009). When students are selecting the writing resources, they are able to understand the writing process and plan their writing process meanwhile. Furthermore, asking students to improvise is also good strategy to promote students' academic writing in both face-to-face and online context.

As for online learners' speaking and listening obstacle in their learning process, the reason why this challenge emerges is that there is no body language and eye contact in the context of online learning. In this case, what online instructors could do is clearing their speaking tone and activating online learners. Using external motivation appropriately is also able to encourage learners in expressing their thinking. The anonymous strategy could also be used. Online learners tend to be more creative when they could post online anonymously.

Conclusion

Important facets identified by participants are the issues of learning skills, the issues of learning emotion, the issues of interaction, the issues of learning environment, the issues of technology and the issues of instructor. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden, 2009; LaVonne, Karen Sue and Jack, 2015; Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson and Young, 2014). It is helpful for us to better known online learners so that instructors are able to design their pedagogical process accordingly.

Meanwhile, five recommendations are also suggested that are *encourage students to be active in learning process*, *increase interactions*, *provide technological help*, *support metacognitive strategies* and *promote language scaffold*. These recommendations are designed to help online instructors to adjust their teaching process, studies are still needed to confirm the effectiveness of these recommendations practically however.

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