

# Exploring EFL Learners' Readiness for Online Learning at Higher Education Level

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**Abstract.** This research aims to explore to what extent EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in South China are ready for online English learning. The data of 128 first graders at a private undergraduate school who gave opinions in the form of a study skill scale were gathered and analyzed. By conducting correlation analysis and regression modeling it was found that the samples have a relatively moderate readiness for online learning. Among the four dimensions, technical factors play a significant role in determination of readiness while motivation, time and communication exert limited influence on it. As a result, for further promotion of online learning it was suggested that practitioners could take technical issues into consideration, and it was also conducive for researchers to carry out further study in different contexts and take into consideration the contextual factors in readiness for online learning.

**Keywords:** Readiness for online learning; technical; EFL learners.

## 1. Introduction

In 2023 the government in China noted clearly that blended teaching should be an element in learning and teaching, which has been part of the national educational policy for higher education [1]. Online learning has gradually been an indispensable element or a norm in higher education. Many online platforms such as MOOCs, U-campus, Web+, E-learning, M-learning, cloud class, smart learning and other media have been developed with the hope to improve education quality. The conventional classroom which was rather basic now is installed with a variety of modern teaching facilities including multi-media, interactive board, projectors and smart computers as well as connection to the Internet. A transformation from the traditional face-to-face classroom meeting to innovative learning has taken place not only in the country but also in other places in the world. The importance of educational technology and knowledge has been increasingly recognized by instructors, learners and researchers [2, 3]. In the field of research and study, educational technology such as online learning was found to be among the highest frequently appeared list in the keywords of publication from 2010 to 2020, in particular, learning readiness ranked among the highest concurrences of keyword [2].

## 2. Online learning readiness and measurement

Online learning distinguishes itself from classroom meeting has been now accepted at different levels of education throughout the world. It was regarded as a new learning approach where computers, internet, platform, learning applications available online or via mobile devices or learning management system are used to facilitate learning or lectures [2-4, 6]. In this paper, online learning is defined in a broad sense as the learning approach with a combination of educational technology to realize learning complementary to the formal classroom setting or simultaneously in the face-to-face classroom meeting with the hope to include more detailed study on the readiness and a whole picture of the new learning model. Online learning readiness refers to as the level or degree of the preparation and willingness for online learning activities [4]. Despite the relative agreement on the definition of learning readiness, there is still no consensus on what may compose the determinants of readiness. For both online students at high school level, two studies developed a three-dimension scale with 20 items and a scale with 36 items respectively, but both were approved to be valid, credible and reliable

to measure the readiness. Research at not only secondary school but also university level [7, 10] more or less applied similar scales in the quantitative study. By comparing their major items and influential factors, it can be drawn that due to the wide range of differences in learners, geographies, programs and languages levels, the scales or instruments demonstrated different classifications and wording of the items, however, they beard comparison with each other, where motivation, learning skills, self-directed learning and educational technology were the indispensable elements. When selecting the appropriate instrument and scale for the online learning readiness, the above determinants were carefully considered so as to use the Online Assessment provided by OASIS online.

### **3. Research on Online learning readiness**

There is evidence in research of learners at different levels of education and programs are crucial factors in determining the success implementation and effectiveness of online course [3, 6]. By gathering data using online learning scale among 134 online learning undergraduates, learner learning outcome and success has significant relation to online learning readiness which was measured by online learning scale in dimensions including computer/internet skills, self-management of learning, learner control, motivation, online communication ability. The results indicate the most contributive factors are learner control and online learning communication self-efficacy [4]. It was proved in some research that quite high-level readiness for learning was shown among Health Sciences learners' readiness with motivation and confidence in technical skills as the top dimensions whereas self-discipline ranked the least [7]. Different from this, learners in were shown at medium level of the overall learning readiness computer skills, therefore their motivation for learning and self-control ranked nearly the same with [4] and [7].

In order to examine the learners' readiness for online English learning in higher education and to better carry out the implementation, the research the research was conducted to address the questions:

1. What is the readiness level of the EFL learners for online learning?
2. What are the correlations among the four dimensions?

### **4. Methodology**

The research employed a quantitative design. The participants were first graders at a private college in South China and they had undergone the pandemic and were taking online learning for English. A total of 140 non-English majors were gathered for convenience sample. The Online Assessment by OASIS for international students were used. It is a five-degree Likert scale with 15 items in communication, time, motivation and technical skills from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. The level of readiness for learning is determined by the mean of the 15 questions in the 4 dimensions. The higher mean score determines the higher online learning readiness.

140 paper questionnaires were distributed to the sample and 12 of them was cleaned for ineffectiveness and 128 was gathered for data collecting analysis by excel and IBM SPSS Statistics 27. According to the reliability value test of all the items of the scale, Cronbach's alpha is 0.724, suggesting the current study reliable. The study also carried out the correlation analysis to examine the relation among the communication, time, motivation and technical skills. Then regression analysis was used to establish influential elements among the above 4 dimensions.

### **5. Findings**

#### **5.1. The answer to what is the readiness level of the EFL learners for online learning**

The mean score for each item on the four dimensions in the assessment scale was illustrated as follows.

**Table 1.** Mean Score and Standard Deviation Value of Each Dimension.

Dimension in readiness	Mean	Standard Deviation
Communication	3.63	0.72
Time	3.59	0.56
Motivation	3.65	0.59
Technical Skills	3.72	0.62

N=128

Table 1 describes learners mean scores and standard deviation in the four dimensions. The 5-point rating system's means, which range from 3.63 to 3.72, show that learners' readiness for online learning is just above average and moderate, meaning the majority of students weren't completely unprepared for using online resources or participating in online learning tasks, nor were they completely prepared to use them. Among the four dimensions, technical skills, motivation rank the top followed by communication while time is the least, which may suggest the learners are more confident in technology than any other dimensions and have some motivation and communication skills for online learning but lack control of time.

## 5.2. The answer to what are the correlations among the four dimensions

**Table 2.** The Correlations of Each Dimension

Dimensions	Communication	Time	Motivation	Technical Skills
Communication	1			
Time	.202*	1		
Motivation	.251**	.347**	1	
Technical Skills	.316**	.454**	.347**	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level(2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2-tailed).

Correlation and regression analyses were employed to explore if the four dimensions have some influence on each other and Table 2 elaborates the relationship between them showing that all the four dimensions were positively and strongly significantly related to each other ( $p < 0.01$ ) except for the time and communication shared a comparatively moderate correlation with each other ( $0.01 \leq p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 3.** The Regression Analysis of Communication as Dependent Variable.

Model Summary b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std.Error of the Estimate
1	.351a	0.123	0.102	0.68305

a. Predictors:(Constant), Mean\_technical skills, Mean\_ Motivation, Mean\_time

b. Dependent Variable: Mean\_communication

By using multiple regression, when communication was the dependent variable, the value of R square 0.123 the table which is less than 0.25 meaning the level of the prophecy is not strong.

**Table 4.** ANOVAa.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.147	3	2.716	5.821	.001b
	Residual	57.853	124	0.467		
	Total	66	127			

a Dependent Variable: Mean\_communication

b Predictors:(Constant), Mean\_technical skills,Mean\_ Motivation,Mean\_time

The F ratio 5.821 in ANOVA and P value ( $p < 0.01$ ) demonstrates the overall model fits the data. At least one of the three independent variables significantly predict dependent variable.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings are generally in agreement with the previous studies about online learning readiness for learners at different levels in the other similar contexts [4, 5, and 10] which indicates learners are not unwilling to take part for the online course though the degree of readiness is not very high. It is possible that learners can accept both online and face to face course at the same time. There is a tendency that learners' readiness for online course were quite divided with part of learners wanting to be in the face-to-face class meeting [5]. The potential explanation for this phenomenon may be the social context for the study [5] was about the pandemic time and this paper is at the post-pandemic period with the sample who underwent longitudinal online learning so their readiness for online learning is moderate, not very high nor low showing no significance difference. In view of this future research may be on contextual factors' influence on readiness such as different types of programs, length of time devoted to online learning and institutional planning.

The paper found among the dimensions, technical skills and motivation are the most influential factors for online learning [4, 7]. This shows learners are generally confident in mastering computers and can be motivated to participate in online learning and the self-confidence in mastering technical skills was defined as self-efficacy and the degree of self-efficacy is strongly related to the student's perception of the online course [6]. It is confirmed that the better they can use the technology as learning tools, the more likely they are to enjoy online learning. As for time and communication, they are less confident. In fact, quite a lot of study show concern about this issue such as self-regulation and asking for support [5, 6, and 7]. This paper shows the unconfidence in time and communication is comparably lower but the degrees of both are around average which reveals that learners have little problem in the time management and self-control because they are learners at high educational levels while the former studies were about secondary school learners who are younger in terms of age. It would have implication that more research can be done on the readiness for online learners at different ages.

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