Omani Students’ Satisfaction with Independent Learning Tools during Covid-19

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Abstract
Omani students were introduced to Independent Learning Tools, such as MyELT, Moodle, and MS Teams, during the Covid-19 pandemic. They used these tools for their study throughout the pandemic. Hence, this research investigated how satisfied were Omani students with independent learning tools during Covid-19. This study is significant because it has pedagogical implications for all the stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and policymakers. This study adopted a quantitative research method. A self-prepared questionnaire was distributed to students for data collection. Study participants were students from Level one, Level two, Level three, and Level four of the General Foundation Program in the English Language Center at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra, Oman. About 227 (N=227) students participated in the survey. Study findings suggest that students’ satisfaction with independent learning tools is above average. Conducting similar research studies in other Higher Educational Institutions in Oman will help make and sustain policy decisions.

Keywords: covid-19, independent learning, learning management systems, Omani students’ satisfaction

Introduction

The recent shift from traditional learning environment to student-centered learning environment integrates both the physical and virtual learning environments to foster meaningful and relevant learning experiences for students. Gunduz and Ozcan (2017) pointed out that blended learning, a combination of face-to-face teaching and an e-learning program, facilitates student-centered learning. Apart from the basic computer-based programs such as PowerPoint presentations and audio-visual education, many educational institutions have started using various digital tools in the classrooms, such as Edmodo, Socrative, Thinglink, TED-Ed, cK-12, ClassDojo, eduClipper, Storybird, Animoto, and Kahoot, widespread among teachers and learners. These tools play a fundamental role in teaching and facilitating communication between teachers and students. Also, the following digital tools perform a significant role in digital classroom management: Scratch, SelfCAD, Quizlet / Quizlet Live, Google Classroom, Adobe Spark Video, Khan Academy, Seesaw, and Class Dojo.

According to Orabah, Bijani, and Ismail's (2022) study on student-centered learning, online discussion (Moodle-based practices) was found to be the only activity that English teachers rarely used when compared to other student-centered learning-related activities before Covid-19. Teachers' justifications varied, but the most frequently cited reason was teachers' lack of Moodle knowledge. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of the integration of digital tools in teaching and learning. Students had to use digital tools, such as MyELT, Moodle, and MS Teams, to attend online-classes and meet the requirements of continuous assessments. During this process, these tools have provided students with opportunities for independent learning. According to a study conducted by Allen and Seaman (2017), there were six million students who participated globally in at least one higher education online program in 2015, in contrast to 1.6 million in 2002 (cited in Kashoob & Attamimi, 2021). However, the number of students who participated in online programs increased dramatically during Covid-19. Nevertheless, few research studies have been conducted concerning Omani students’ satisfaction with independent learning tools in Oman, especially at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra, Oman. Hence, this study aims to determine Omani students’ satisfaction with Independent Learning Tools. The study is significant because it has pedagogical implications for all the stakeholders, such as teachers, students, and policy-makers. The study adopted a quantitative research method.

The study has four objectives: To determine (1) students’ level of satisfaction with MyELT, Moodle, and MS Teams, (2) the difference between the mean of two factors in students’ level of satisfaction with ILTs, (3) the difference among levels studied, (4) relationship between factors of student satisfaction. This study seeks to answer the research question of how satisfied Omani students were with independent learning tools during the Covid-19 pandemic. To answer the research question, six null hypotheses were formulated:

1. Opinion regarding the statement on students’ level of satisfaction with MyELT
2. Opinion regarding the statement on students’ level of satisfaction with Moodle
3. Opinion regarding the statement on students’ level of satisfaction with MS Teams
4. There is no significant difference between the mean of the two factors in students’ level of satisfaction with ILTs.
5. There is no significant difference among levels studied regarding factors of students’ level of satisfaction with ILTs.
6. There is no relationship between factors of student satisfaction with ILTs.
Literature Review

Learning Management System (LMS) is a web-based technology used by instructors to manage the teaching and learning process. Although LMS has been used in different sectors, the educational sector got benefitted a lot during the Covid-19 pandemic. Research studies, in general, show that online learning has increased significantly ever since the COVID-19 pandemic hit globally in 2020. Every educational institution moved into online teaching mode using various online platforms, such as MS Teams and Google, to ensure continuity of teaching and learning. One of the main advantages of the advancement of online teaching tools is that students can learn anywhere or at any time. Rojabi (2020) and Wichanpricha (2021) argued that using a platform like MS Teams allows students to improve all four components (reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills) in learning English as it will enable students to converse with the facilitator during the video conference or leave a message in the chat. However, one of the main questions is whether this vital tool optimizes learning for students who have never done or even trained to be part of an entire online learning course. Salih and Omar (2020) concluded in their research that more than 50% of the students in their study have positive views about online learning. Still, it comes with many challenges, which made the experience challenging for some. This finding does not come as a surprise, as the switch to full-time online learning happened without warning, and most students weren’t ready for the sudden switch. A few recent studies have shown common issues that EFL students face during video conferences online classes, such as weak internet, problems with devices, insufficient time to discuss in class, and lack of reply from their facilitators (Salih & Omar, 2020; Rojabi, 2020; Wichanpricha, 2021).

Previous studies point out that Moodle is one of the most used LMS in the educational industry as a form of supplementary platform even before the Covid-19 pandemic. This is because Moodle allows educators to create personalized digital lesson materials and exercises to cater to their students’ needs. A study conducted by Acar and Kayaoglu (2020) pointed out that Moodle can play a positive role in the revision and reinforcement of what is taught in English lessons. In addition, it could be used as a supplementary tool to motivate students as it moves beyond the traditional method of paper and pen learning. Al Bataineh, Banikalef, and Albashtawi’s (2019) study also revealed that blended learning could help students improve their computer skills and understand their lessons better in more relaxed settings that account for all differences. Buczek-Zawila’s (2021) study findings showed that Moodle online assessments eliminated the fear of failure and poor self-esteem of students as they could confidently attempt the exercises multiple times, which could encourage positive reinforcement of independent learning among students. Ghounane’s (2020) study also confirmed that Moodle provided a safe environment for students and teachers to conduct assessment activities and share feedback.

Alameri, Masadeh, Hamadallah, Ismail, & Fakhouri (2020) studied E-learning platforms (Moodle, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom platforms) at the University of Jordan Education and their Relation to self-study and Academic Achievement during the Covid-19 pandemic. His study argued that “e-learning using Moodle, Microsoft teams, and Zoom platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic is highly known to respondents and has a positive effect on their self-study and academic achievement.” (p. 31). A similar study by Kashoob (2021) explored Omani EFL Students' Perceptions of the Newly Adopted Online Learning Platforms at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Salalah. The findings of the study suggested that “the online learning environment is very conducive in motivating them towards learning English through an admittedly complex and challenging framework, that not all members of a learning community can take
comprehensive advantage of.” The studies carried out by Alameri and Kashoob confirmed that MS Teams, and Moodle have positive effects on learner autonomy.

Unlike Moodle, MyELT is a platform (created by National Geographic) where teachers do not need to prepare and upload any materials, but only monitor the usage. According to a research study by Tayşi and Başaran (2018), including MyELT as part of the LMS keeps students motivated in English language learning. A similar study by Ali, Kalarikkal, Ismail, and Oumayma Khenfer (2021) has demonstrated that the more students use MyELT, the more knowledge they gain. The previous studies suggest that independent learning tools such as MS Teams, Moodle, and MyELT have been practical and valuable for students.

In the Omani context, higher educational institutions incorporated various digital tools to continue teaching and learning during the pandemic. For example, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Oman integrated digital s such as MS Teams, Moodle, and MyELT for teaching and learning purposes. A study conducted, during the pandemic, by Chinnathambi et al. (2021), concluded that “the abrupt transition from face-to-face to online teaching has not obstructed teaching and learning”. Other studies by the same author (2022a) and (2022b) at UTAS-Ibra, Oman, confirmed that online teaching via digital tools positively affects teaching and learning. Findings of the research conducted by Kashoob (2021), and Alameri et al. (2020) validated that MS Teams and Moodle have been very conducive to motivating students and promoting self-study among students. Another study by Ali et al. (2021) at UTAS-Ibra, Oman, suggested that My ELT has played a crucial role in helping students gain more knowledge. Few research studies were conducted regarding Omani students’ satisfaction with independent learning tools. This study aims to fill the research gap.

Method
The study adopted a quantitative research method. As this method was suitable to answer the research question, a questionnaire was distributed via Moodle to students to collect numerical data.

Participants
The students who participated in the survey were from the General Foundation Program (GFP) in English Language Centre at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra, Sultanate of Oman, during the academic year 2021-22. About 227 students from Level one, Level two, Level three, and Level four participated in the survey. The study participants were from the Sharqiyah region, and they shared similar regional, cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds. A simple random sampling method was used to collect data.

Research Instruments
A questionnaire with close-ended questions was used as a research tool to collect data. The questions were prepared based on classroom experience to answer the research question and aims. A random sampling method was used to collect data. After proper validation and proven reliability, the questionnaire was distributed to the study participants to collect data. Scientific Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis and interpretation.
Research Procedures

The data collected from the partakers were coded and entered into SPSS to find out Students’ level of satisfaction with independent learning tools. Statistical descriptions and graphs of students’ satisfaction with independent learning tools were demonstrated through SPSS analysis. The format was a five-part Likert scale varying from one (‘strongly disagree’) to five (‘strongly agree’ in response to specific statements regarding students’ perceptions of the use and efficacy of writing error correction symbols. Biographical information obtained via the questionnaire was included, such as age, gender, location, and levels studied. The findings were analyzed and displayed as statistics, bar charts and graphs. Figures one and two given below are the results of normality tests. The figures show the graphical representation of the normal distribution.

![Figure 1. Density](image1.png)

![Figure 2. Histogram](image2.png)

Findings

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Four Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>29.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>29.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to table 1, Levels one and two have the highest number of respondents, with 67 and 68 students, respectively. On the other hand, Levels three and four have 45 and 47 respondents, respectively.

Table 2: Opinion Regarding Statement on Students’ Level of Satisfaction with MyELT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement on MyELT</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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According to the findings, the grand mean score of all statements on the level of satisfaction with MyELT is 3.66, which proves that the students’ level of satisfaction is above average. The p-value is <0.01. From this result, it can be inferred that this tool has promoted independent learning among students and is proven effective in advocating autonomous education among students. This result is an added advantage to the administration to sustain the use of this tool as a continuous support to learner autonomy.

Table 3. Opinion Regarding Statement on Students’ Level of Satisfaction with Moodle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement on Moodle</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>5.2791</td>
<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>5.1788</td>
<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.5517</td>
<td>0.1221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.6939</td>
<td>0.09161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>2.7694</td>
<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the result, the mean scores of three statements on the level of satisfaction with Moodle are above average. From the mean score of 3.40, 3.36, and 3.21, it is evident that students confirm: (a) it is easy to find the learning materials, (b) enough materials are available for them, and (c) the teacher’s feedback on their written output is easily accessible. The p-value is <0.01. In the case of the other two statements, the mean score is 3.12 and 3.14, which indicates that the level of satisfaction is nearly above average, and the p-value is above the 5% level of significance, 0.12 and 0.09, respectively. Overall, this tool has contributed to learner autonomy. Hence, it is recommended to sustain the use of Moodle.

Table 4. Opinion Regarding the Statement on Students’ Level of Satisfaction with MS Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement on MS Teams</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS1</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>9.2188</td>
<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS2</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>4.9843</td>
<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the findings, the grand mean score of all statements on the level of satisfaction with MS Teams is 3.59, which proves that the students’ level of satisfaction is above average. The p-value is <0.01. It is clear that this tool has promoted independent learning among students and is effective in advocating autonomous learning among students. This result is an added advantage to the administration to sustain the use of this tool as a continuous support to learner autonomy.

Table 5. There is no significant difference between the means of the two factors in Students’ Level of Satisfaction with Independent Learning Tools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two Factors</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T Value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELT Moodle</td>
<td>18.28418</td>
<td>4.696967</td>
<td>9.0708</td>
<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELT MS Teams</td>
<td>18.28418</td>
<td>4.696967</td>
<td>1.6972</td>
<td>0.09099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moodle MS Teams</td>
<td>18.12166</td>
<td>4.618562</td>
<td>17.96616</td>
<td>5.050508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moodle MS Teams</td>
<td>16.21761</td>
<td>4.618562</td>
<td>-8.2749</td>
<td>&lt;0.001**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. ** denotes significant at 1% level

The result shows a significant difference between the means of MyELT and Moodle (18.28 and 16.12) and between Moodle, and MS Teams (16.22 and 17.97). The p-value is <0.01 and the t-value is 9.07 and 8.27. This implies that students do not share the same level of satisfaction regarding the above-said factors. Regarding MyELT and Moodle, students did MyELT activities weekly compared to Moodle. Similarly, in the case of Moodle and MS Teams, students did more activities regularly on MS Teams than on Moodle. This is because students chose the assignments or activities on Moodle, unlike the other two platforms, where they had specific activities to complete every week. On the other hand, there is no significant difference between MyELT and MS Teams (18.28 and 17.97). The p-value is 0.09, and the t-value is 1.69. All students are equally satisfied with MyELT and MS Teams as the best independent learning tools.

Table 6. There is no significant difference among levels studied regarding the factors of Students’ Level of Satisfaction with Independent Learning Tools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MyELT</td>
<td>19.42</td>
<td>18.57</td>
<td>18.17</td>
<td>16.31</td>
<td>3.258</td>
<td>0.0127 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings show that there is a significant difference among students studying at different levels regarding MyELT ($F = 3.26, p < 0.05$), Moodle ($F = 4.32, p < 0.01$), MS Teams ($F = 4.52, p < 0.01$), and Overall Satisfaction Level ($F = 4.38, p < 0.01$). The result suggests that students of all four levels do not share a similar opinion on the use of the three independent learning tools. A close look at the mean score of each factor, it is found that Levels one, two, and three are highly satisfied with MyELT, Moodle, and MS Teams. However, the mean score of Level four is comparatively less than the other levels. This may be because the number of assignments and activities assigned to Level four in each of these independent learning platforms were comparatively more and time-consuming, which might have affected the students’ level of satisfaction. Even though the mean score of Level four is low, the data inference shows a positive impact on students from Level one to Level four, so it is recommended to sustain the use of all three independent learning tools.

Table 7. There is no relationship between factors of student satisfaction with Independent Learning tools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>ELT</th>
<th>MOODLE</th>
<th>MS Teams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.72**</td>
<td>0.82**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOODLE</td>
<td>0.72**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.78**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Teams</td>
<td>0.82**</td>
<td>0.78**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

The findings reveal that the correlation between MyELT and Moodle is 0.72, which indicates ($0.72^2 = 0.5184$) 51.84 percent strong positive relationship between MyELT and Moodle. The correlation between MyELT and MS Teams is 0.82, which means ($0.82^2 = 0.6724$) 67.24 percent strong positive relationships between MyELT and MS Teams. The correlation between MS Teams and Moodle, is 0.78, which means ($0.78^2 = 0.6084$), 60.84 percent strong positive relationships between MyELT and Moodle. Since the p-value is <0.01, there is a strong positive correlation between factors of independent learning tools. This means that students have expressed a similar opinion regarding independent learning tools as they directly contribute to the development of learner autonomy.
**Summary of the findings**

The grand mean score of MyELT (3.66), MS Teams (3.59), and the mean scores of Moodle (3.4, 3.36, 3.21, 3.12, and 3.14), show up that the level of satisfaction of students is above average. There is a significant difference between means of MyELT and Moodle (18.28 and 16.12) and between Moodle, and MS Teams (16.22 and 17.97). It is evident from the differences that the students are more satisfied with MyELT and MS Teams than Moodle. Similarly, the difference among students studying different levels does not affect Omani students’ satisfaction with independent learning tools. The correlation study also confirms that students benefit from the independent learning tools. Overall, the study findings show that the students are satisfied with independent learning tools.

**Discussion**

This study attempted to answer the research question of how satisfied Omani students were with independent learning tools during Covid-19. To answer the research question, six null hypotheses were formulated. According to the results of the null hypotheses, the level of satisfaction of students with MyELT, Moodle, and MS Teams is above average. Although there were slight differences among the level studied and the mean of two factors concerning independent learning tools, overall result is that the students are satisfied with MyELT, Moodle, and MS Teams. It is evident that independent learning tools such as MyELT, Moodle, and MS Teams promote independent learning among students and play a significant role in developing learner autonomy. The results of the quantitative data collected from 277 participants also confirm previous research findings that (a) MS Teams promoted effective learning (Rojabi, 2020; Wichanpricha, 2021; Kashoob, 2021; Alameri et al., 2020), (b) Moodle, as a supplementary tool, help students revise and reinforce the lessons learned in the class, improve their computer skills and help understand their lessons better (Acar & Kayaoglu’s, 2020; Buczek-Zawila, 2021; Kashoob, 2021; Alameri et al., 2020; Al Bataineh, Banikalef & Albashtawi, 2019), and (c) MyELT helps students gain more knowledge and affects students’ motivational level positively (Taşı & Başaran, 2018; Ali et al., 2021). However, the present study has limitations. The data were collected only from UTAS-Ibra, Oman. Therefore, the study results cannot be generalized for all the institutes in Oman.

**Conclusion**

The study aimed to investigate how satisfied Omani students were with independent learning tools. The findings of the study show that students’ satisfaction with the use of independent learning tools such as Moodle, MyELT, and MS Teams is above average. Although students were more satisfied with MyELT and MS Teams than Moodle, study results clearly show that all these tools have promoted independent learning among students and have proven effective in advocating autonomous education among students. Hence it is recommended to sustain this practice to encourage learner autonomy among the students in General Foundation Program at UTAS-Ibra. Also, conducting similar studies in other higher educational institutes in Oman will help in policy decision makings.
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