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EFL Students' Agility in Online Learning During the Covid-19: A Gender Study

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the agility of male and female senior high EFL students of SMA Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study employs the theory of learning agility introduced by Gravatt and Caldwell (2016). As they stated, there are four dimensions of learning agility, namely; *mental agility, people agility, results in agility, and change agility.* The sampling technique used was random sampling. 150 students of X PMIA 1, 2, 3, and X PIS 1 and 2 were selected as the participants. The score of male students for all types of learning agility was 6798. While the score of female students for all types of learning agility was 6831. From 150 participants, the percentage of male students who had a high level of agility was 27,33%, while the female students were 26%. The percentage of male students who had a moderate la level of agility was 22,67%, while the female students were 78.33%. None of the male and female students had a low level of agility. The results showed that when it came to the o general calculation of scores, the female students were higher and more agile. However, when it was seen individually, especially in the learning activities, the male students had a higher level of agility rather than the female students.
Keywords: EFL Students, Agility, Online Learning, Gender

1. Introduction

The spread of Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has brought a new reality to teaching and learning activities at schools (Wong et al., 2019). Both teachers and students must be able to utilize any model of online learning due to the pandemic situation. This pandemic does not select any specific victims. Anyone, of different ages, gender, social life, ethnicity, city, or country, can be infected. This harsh situation has pushed the government to establish rules referring to staying at home, working from home, and even learning from home.

To achieve the goals of online teaching and learning methods during this situation, Google Classroom is implemented worldwide through the daily life of teaching and learning activities (Heggart & Yoo, 2018). Google Classroom is a free web service developed by Google for schools that aims to simplify creating, distributing, and grading assignments. The main purpose of Google Classroom is to streamline the process of sharing files between teachers and students. It enables teachers to create an online classroom area in which they can manage all documents which their students need. However, online learning is not as simple as people would think. Cheng (2020) said that teachers need to pay close attention to the student's learning status and guided students to have a better home study. Teachers must stimulate students' motivation and activeness by giving students clear learning goals, and designing essential autonomous learning tasks based on the core content of teaching to increase students' participation and agility in online learning.

When it comes to online learning, Wightman (2020) stated that it is commonly assumed that females can learn languages at a quicker pace than males. Since males rely on the auditory and visual components of their brains and females employ abstract thinking with a holistic approach, it can be concluded that males and females differ in skill level with various language acquisition methods (Burman, Bitan & Booth, 2008). In addition, Wardhaugh (2005) argued that gender is unavoidable; it is part of how societies are ordered around us, with each society doing that ordering differently, including classroom situations.

Gender differences in education can occur in the acquisition of learning achievement. Males and females have different characteristics, motivations, and agility in learning languages and linguistics. In general, learning agility relates to adaptability and willingness to confront new situations. Specifically, learning agility attempts to predict an individual's potential performance in new tasks (*Hoff & Burke*, 2017). Gravett and Caldwell (2016) defined 4 types of learning agility; (1) mental agility which refers to individuals who are comfortable with complexity, examine problems carefully and make connections between different things, (2) people agility which refers to individuals who know themselves well and can readily deal with diverse people and tough situations, (3) result agility which refers to those resourceful individuals who can deliver results in first-time situations by inspiring others and having a significant impact, and (4) change agility which refers to individuals who like to experiment and can cope effectively with the discomfort of rapid change.

Moreover, Mitchinson & Morris (2014) argued that there are 2 reasons why learning agility has become more important than ever before. The first is rapid developments in technology make ongoing personal advancement imperative and place serious demands on learning agility. Another reason is globalization. Education is now operating in a context with a wider variety of foreign languages and broader ranges of international and cultural differences About that, generally, people assume that men are dominant in more things rather than women are. As Talbot (1993) argued that those gender stereotypes are linked to gender ideology and reproduce naturalized gender differences. Based on the phenomenon above, this study aims to investigate the agility of both male and female students line EFL learning during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as to see which is more agile between both engenders conducting so, it is hoped that the result of this study may extend the theory of learning agility and gender realms.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Online Learning

Online learning is, by definition, the process of educating pupils through the use of the internet and other computer-based tools (Häfner, Häfner, & Ovtcharova, 2013). Students and teachers can collaborate remotely, frequently at any time of day, with online learning. Online teaching, online instruction, and remote learning are less frequently used terms to refer to online learning. Online learning is one of the most practical techniques of learning since it can take place even when the participants are in different places. 2. Identification of a student that enrolls in an online course is the same as one that enrolls in a course in a traditional classroom. Online classroom management is a delicate balance (Häfner et al., 2013). We need to set the tone for what the new normal will look like. But at the same time, we need to transfer ownership of learning to students. Understand that students are willing participants to respond to their needs and interests.

2.2. EFL Learning

The primary factor that will likely contribute to online learning's future growth is its ability to save students time (Dou, Qin, Jin, & Li, 2018). Students can easily access instructional content from the comfort of their homes thanks to technological improvements. Additionally, students have the option of accessing this content while on the go. The best strategy to handle student behaviors in an EFL classroom is to establish an engaging lesson plan that encourages participation from all of the students. An engaged learner is not typically a problem learner. Despite this, not all students are enrolled in EFL courses voluntarily.

The best activities that encourage students in EFL classrooms to produce English ought to: have a clear, measurable, and suitable objective (Chiou, 2020). achieve progress in English use. easy to manage in English. be interesting to the students. Online courses are taken as part of online education. Students benefit from the flexibility and convenience of being able to read at their own pace without having to adhere to a rigid schedule.

Students are most suited for online learning; however, with the aid of a gadget with internet connectivity, the course may be finished anywhere (Chiou, 2020). For students who are unable to attend conventional classrooms, this kind of education is appropriate and affordable. To assure online education, students can access a variety of online resources, including video lectures, animated films, games, and graphics. Live engagement is the most effective kind of online learning since it allows for two-way communication via videoconference.

2.3. Student Agility in Online Learning

In recent years, the education sector has had some of the fastest business growth, and online learning has gained popularity in the rapidly developing society (Elshami et al., 2021). Students can attend courses from other nations when they take online courses. Some colleges and universities also offer eLearning courses or hybrid courses that are delivered both in-person and online. To keep up with the increasingly advanced learning process, these conventional brick-and-mortar institutions are also providing more online courses. Due to the development of technology and people's desire to learn at their own pace, the emergence of online education is convincing.

Even while the shift from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction has made things more secure for both students and teachers (Häfner et al., 2013), there are still some distinctive characteristics that blur the distinction between the two modes of instruction. Despite online education's tremendous popularity, the majority of individuals avoid using it. Depending on their needs and tastes, the people decide that the approach is appropriate.

2.4. Gender Study

The study of gender identity and gendered representation is the focus of the interdisciplinary academic area known as gender studies. Women's studies, which focus on women, feminism, gender, and politics, is where gender studies got their start. These days, the field combines men's studies and gay studies. After 1990, it began to gain popularity, particularly in Western colleges, at the same time as deconstruction. Additionally, gender studies examine how the categories of gender and sexuality are influenced by race, ethnicity, region, socioeconomic status, and disability.

By fostering a shared knowledge of gender identity and relationships, gender studies help people in various social contexts resolve gender-related issues (Zayed, 2014). It examines the similarities and differences between men and women. Understanding the specific requirements and contributions that each gender provides to society is made possible through gender studies.

Gender is relevant to numerous academic fields, including literary theory, theatrical studies, film theory, performance theory, contemporary art history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and psychology(Piller & Gerber, 2021). The methods and objectives for why and how gender is examined, however, can vary within various areas. In politics, it is possible to see gender as a fundamental discourse that political players use to establish their positions on a range of topics. With methods and approaches drawn from many other fields, gender studies is also a discipline unto itself.

3. Methods

This is a survey study that employs descriptive statistics in analyzing the data. According to Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen (2010), in survey research, investigators ask questions about peoples' beliefs, opinions, characteristics, and behavior. A survey researcher may want to investigate associations between respondents' characteristics such as; age, education, social class, race, and their current attitudes toward one issue. Balnaves & Caputi (2001) added that a survey is a method of collecting data from people about who they are (education, finance, etc.), how they think (motivation, beliefs, etc.) and what they do (behavior). This study is categorized as a cross-sectional survey since it collected information from a sample that has been determined from a population at a single point in time although the time it takes to collect all of the data may take anywhere from a day to a few weeks or more.

Population and sample are two related terms in research. They are needed as a step and part to do the research. The population is all members of the well-defined class of events or objects, meanwhile, the sample is a portion of the population (Ary, Jacob & Sorensen, 2010). The population in this study were 335 senior high school English as a foreign language (EFL) students of SMA Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar, North Sumatera.

Class	Number of Students		
	Male	Female	Total
X PMIA 1	8	23	31
X PMIA 2	10	22	32
X PMIA 3	21	8	29
X PMIA 4	10	22	32
X PMIA 5	12	18	30
X PMIA 6	13	19	32
X PMIA 7	21	9	30
X PMIA 8	18	11	29
X PIS 1	17	12	29

X PIS 2	19	10	29
X PIS 3	4	28	32
Total	153	182	335

The sample was chosen by occupying random sampling. As Cresswell (2006) stated that random sampling is a research method in which each individual in the population has an equal probability of being selected (a systematic or probabilistic sample). Thus, students of X PMIA 1, 2, 3, and X PIS 1 and 2 were the sample. The number of each class was as the followings:

Class	Number of Students		
	Male	Female	Total
X PMIA 1	8	23	31
X PMIA 2	10	22	32
X PMIA 3	21	8	29
X PIS 1	17	12	29
X PIS 2	19	10	29
Total	75	75	150

3.1. Data Collection and Analysis

The data of this study were collected through closed-ended questionnaires. Closed-ended questions are used when all the possible, relevant responses to a question can be specified, and the number of possible responses is limited (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). The questionnaires contained 25 questions with 5 scaled items (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = usually, 5 = always).

After the data were collected, they were then analyzed through the following procedures (Gravett and Caldwell, 2016):

3.2. Scoring the Questionnaires and Their Interpretations

Each type of agility within the questionnaires was scored as in the table below:

Table 3. Agility scores based on the types

Mental Agility	**People Agility**	**Change Agility**	**Results Agility**
Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 4	Statement 3
Statement 6	Statement 14	Statement 5	Statement 10
Statement 8	Statement 19	Statement 7	Statement 15
Statement 9	Statement 22	Statement 11	Statement 17
Statement 12	Statement 23	Statement 13	Statement 18
Statement 20	Statement 25	Statement 16	Statement 21
-	-	-	Statement 24
Total	Total	Total	Total

To avoid misunderstanding while the participants (students) fill out the questionnaires, the questionnaires were designed in Bahasa Indonesia. The questionnaires were distributed through Google Doc. application. The respondents filled it out online. The scores of each student were then interpreted as the followings:

Table 4. Score interpretations

Score	**Agility Level**	**Interpretation**
0 – 45	Low	Tend to avoid activities that promote learning agility. Gaining competency in this area will take effort and patience.
46 – 90	Moderate	Tend to be comfortable with activities that promote learning agility, although you do not always go out of your way to use this competency. With some effort, you could build learning agility, and the experience would be very satisfying.
91 – 125	High	This is your comfort zone, where you show a high level of confidence and learning agility. You are encouraged to coach others on achieving higher levels of learning agility.

3.3. Finding the Percentage of the Agility of Male and Female Students

After all, the data were classified, they were finally calculated to find the percentage to know the comparison of learning agility between male and female students. To find the number of students' agility levels, the following formula was used:

To find the percentage, the formula below is used: one:

P = Percentage
r = Number of students
n = Sample of research

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. A score of Male and Female Students' Agility

The score of male students' agility for each type can be seen in the table below. The subtotal score in mental agility is 1581; people agility is 1666; change agility is 1665, and result agility is 1886. Hence, the total score for all types of agility is 6798.

Table 5. Agility Scores of Male Students

A score for Each Type of Agility				
No	**Mental**	**People**	**Change**	**Result**
1	266	260	275	267
2	248	278	238	279
3	271	275	292	250
4	257	288	274	273
5	283	289	287	272
6	256	276	299	257
7	-	-	-	288
Sub Total	**1581**	**1666**	**1665**	**1886**
Total	**6798**			

While the score of female students' agility for each type can be seen in the table below. The subtotal score in mental agility is 1582; people agility is 1653; change agility is 1639, and result agility is 1957. Hence, the total score for all types of agility is 6831.

Table 6. Agility Scores of Female Students

A score for Each Type of Agility				
No	**Mental**	**People**	**Change**	**Result**
1	277	269	276	271
2	244	253	231	283
3	287	288	269	223
4	234	288	286	279
5	287	282	288	305
6	253	273	289	284
7	-	-	-	312
Sub Total	**1582**	**1653**	**1639**	**1957**
Total	**6831**			

4.2. Levels of Male and Female Students' Agility

The number of male and female students who achieved a low, moderate, and high level of agility is described in the table below. It can be seen that: (1) there were 41 male students and 39 female students who had high agility; (2). there were 34 male students and 36 female students who had moderate agility. The high level means the students have a high level of confidence and learning agility as well as encouraged to coach others on achieving higher levels of learning agility. While the moderate level means the students have some effort to build learning agility and the experience was satisfying. None of the male and female students had a low level of agility.

Table 7. Agility Levels of Male and Female Students

Gender	Level of Agility		
	Low (0 - 45)	**Moderate (46 - 90)**	**High (91 - 125)**
Male	-	34	41
Female	-	36	39

The percentage of agility levels between male and female students is described in the table below. From 150 participants, the percentage of male students who had a high level of agility was 27,33%, while the female students were 26%. The percentage of male students who had a moderate level of agility was 22,67%, while the female students were 24%. None of the male and female students had a low level of agility.

Table 8. Percentage of Male and Female Students' Agility Level

Gender	Level of Agility		
	Low (0 - 45)	**Moderate (46 - 90)**	**High (91 - 125)**
Male	-	22,67%	27,33%
Female	-	24%	26%

5. Discussion

This study attempts to investigate the agility of male and female senior high EFL students of SMA Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. None of the male and female students had a low level of agility. The results showed that when it came to the o general calculation of scores, the female students were higher and more agile. However, when it was seen individually, especially in the learning activities, the male students had a higher level of agility rather than the female students. The results of this study confirm several previous findings related to the readiness of female students to adapt from conventional learning to online learning (Elshami et al., 2021). Besides that, this study also found that online learning has several advantages in terms of flexibility, learning time, social interaction, costs, learning materials, and assessment. In terms of flexibility, flexible learning enables students to finish their assignments at their speed. With a reliable internet connection, everyone may take part from anywhere (Joia & Lorenzo, 2021). Both for personal and work purposes, you may frequently travel. A learner can do away with the requirement to commute or move from one location to another.

In terms of study time, through online learning, students will be able to acquire additional skills necessary to compete in the market. With online learning, students can easily get their homework, exams, test results, and much more at their own pace. It permits learning in a remote or underprivileged area. Less class time is required for e-learning courses than for a conventional course. Related to social interaction, more substantial ways are offered for teachers and students to participate in online learning (Ipe, Goel, Howes, & Bakhtary, 2021). Discussions take place via email, forums, discussion boards, online chat for problem-solving, etc. The online environment allows students to get their questions answered. Online education costs between two and three times less than traditional educational institutions. The cost of the materials is quite low for online programs.

Regarding instructional material, an instructor may provide course materials to an online learner in text format, PDF format, video and audio lectures, PowerPoint presentations, or other visual aids. Online courses employ narration, interactions, and simulations (O'Dowd, Sauro, & Spector-Cohen, 2019). For improved online learning, graphics which include icons, symbols, pictures, and illustrations are also beneficial. Animated movies are effective recruitment tools for more contemporary learners.

In terms of carrying out assessments, in the online setting, learning assessment is a crucial component. Written assignments such as short essays, research papers, case study replies, etc. are part of the evaluation process (Huang & Renandya, 2020). Through the assessment, a learner can receive feedback and foster a sense of community. Through online multiple-choice question-and-answer sessions, a learner can receive conventional multiple-choice questions as well as short or lengthy response questions. The in-person proctored exams are another way to demonstrate your mastery of the course material.

6. Conclusion

Regarding the scores of questionnaires filled by the students, female students' score was higher than male students. However, in the learning activities, the male students were proven more agile than the female

students. This means when it came to the general calculation of scores, the female students were higher or more agile. When it was seen individually, especially in the learning activities, the number of male students had a higher level of agility rather than the female students. So the term "nobody is perfect" is appropriate to mention regarding the findings. Each lender has its strengths and weaknesses. Female students are superior to male students in mind which result in agility. The male students are superior to female students in people and change agility. Thus, EFL teachers need to identify and develop students' learning agility to enhance their life skills since what is needed in the field of work is not merely knowledge, but also skills and attitudes. As such, it is the responsibility of teachers to be aware of EFL learning styles and strategies, especially during this Covid-19 pandemic era. Teachers should understand how to reach students and enhance them so that students' achievement can be effectively improved both in and out of the classroom (Wehrwein et. al, 2007). Naturally, both male and female students have strategies to endure themselves in EFL learning.

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