What students say on Self-Directed Language Learning in the context of New Normal: their Difficulties, Coping Mechanisms, and Benefits

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Abstract

Teachers and students throughout the globe faced a variety of issues as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. This research aims to assess self-directed language learners' obstacles and coping mechanisms to contribute to the literature on instructors' and learners' reactions to the epidemic. Utilizing a case study technique based on the Zone of Proximal Development Theory(ZPDT), ten randomly chosen college, self-directed language learners from three purposely and conveniently chosen higher educational schools were interviewed. For triangulation, three instructors and two parents were also questioned. According to rising themes, self-directed language students have problems consulting with instructors, realistic challenges, poor Internet connections, and family responsibility and distractions. They acquired self-confidence, time management skills, self-discipline and formed contingency plans to overcome these obstacles. Furthermore, students achieved academic freedom and self-motivation by employing self-directed language learning in the new normal. This implies a satisfactory transition to a new regular study regimen.

Keywords: new standard, overlapping roles, self-directed language acquisition

Introduction

COVID-19's worldwide proliferation has caused a paradigm change in educational institutions. Learners achieve self-regulated learning in primary education, which includes pre-school, elementary, and high school, where they learn to study at their speed while adhering to the rules provided by their instructors. Self-directed learning occurs when students study alone with minimal support from their instructors (SDL). On the other hand, college students acquire SDL by looking at their pace, following their standards, and receiving less direction from lecturers as long as they complete the needed assignments. They often go above and above what is expected of them in school. Even though SDL was first presented many years ago, it is now critical for college students in the new normal, where they study independently with little or no face-to-face interaction. This research was done because the citizens who also use English as a Second Language (ESL) college students are not immune to this new normal. Language instructors and ESL students will need to adapt to the pandemic to adjust to the new normal in education. Despite the restrictions experienced by both instructors and learners, Ancheta & Ancheta (2020) said that language

acquisition is still necessary for the new normal. Because much of the education takes place online, using new media has become a must. Fostering a student-centered learning environment, such as that demonstrated by Moeller & Abbott (2018), may help promote self-directed learning using online methods.

Review of Literature
Self-Directed Language Learning (SDLL)
Self-directed language learning empowers second language learners so that instructors and students may achieve results both within and outside the classroom (Al Mamun et al., 2022). According to Kim et al. (2021), learners who regulate their language learning using SDL are more likely to succeed. Controlling learning, however, still needs assistance in terms of resources, tactics, and assessment of learning results. This means that instructors have an important role even if students do SDLL. Teachers may have a more crucial social role in the epidemic, as evidenced in SDLL research on technology (Celebi, 2021).

Furthermore, Lee et al. (2017) discovered that technology is a strong predictor of SDLL. This conclusion, however, contradicts the results of Yasmin et al., (2019) research, which found that students' and instructors' technological abilities are unrelated to students' SDLL. As a result, in the new typical environment, when students seldom meet their instructors and courses are taught mainly online, teachers' ability to facilitate students' language acquisition via technology is critical. A student-centered approach to language instruction is also recommended for ESL students to obtain SDL skills. When ESL students take an active role in their language acquisition, they are more likely to find solutions that work for them. Language learning techniques are a variable in language acquisition that leads students to more self-directed learning, according to experimental research conducted by Cheng & Lee (2018) between two adult English as a Foreign Language learners(EFL). Furthermore, EFL learners find it easier to apply new knowledge in various situations (Zhu, 2021).

Phases of Self-Directed Language Learning
According to Dangprasert's (2021) literature analysis, adept students in SDL demonstrate

maturity and responsible learning. Furthermore, they strive to be self-sufficient and take more incredible initiative in their studies. Students must go through the SDLL stages to achieve this, especially in language learning. The following SDLL stages are developed from SDL phases, as mentioned in Li et al. (2021).

Determining the Purposes of Language Learning
The importance of learning tasks in an educational context cannot be overstated. According to Tastemir et al. (2019), learning tasks are the interface between learners and their knowledge; they activate and govern the learning process to guarantee effective learning. Furthermore, learning exercises encourage students to participate actively in their studies. The most challenging aspect of education is identifying learning activities. Learning activities vary in purpose, place, subject matter, scope, form, and difficulty, so they may be completed both within and outside the classroom (Vlaeva & Dörnyei, 2021). Furthermore, learning exercises provide enough time for students to work alone or in groups (Ölmez & Kirkgöz, 2021).

Setting Language Learning Goals
Setting objectives encourages students to take charge of their education. This was shown by Froiland's (2021) integrative review, which found that instructors were beneficial agents in students' goal-setting, which may lead to learning independence. Because the fast change in educational institutions is unavoidable, and technology is a significant component, Li et al., 2021,) claimed that self-directed and self-motivated students are in high demand. According to experimental research conducted among 40 Iranian grade nine students, teachers must demonstrate how to make objectives to encourage autonomous learning.

Furthermore, goal-setting is linked to specific student behaviors. Students created their objectives and encouraged themselves to reach them, leading to the goals being met (Bai & Wang, 2020). Furthermore, Papi& Hiver (2020) said that SDL is a learning process that includes goal-directed and self-controlled learning behavior. At the same time, Overton et al. (2021) stated that students' loss of learning

motivation might be linked to a lack of understanding of defining or attaining their objectives. It may be deduced that instructors or more competent individuals should assist students in learning how to develop goals.

Using Language Learning Techniques

Sulistiyono et al. (2021) define learning techniques as "actions performed by learners to increase their learning." All learning processes need a strategy (Yanuri et al., (2021); hence, learning strategies are critical in SDL and SDLL. Students may be taught language acquisition techniques, just as they can be taught goal planning (Luo, 2020). Language learning techniques are described by Alhebaishi (2019), as stated in Biletska et al. (2021), as "behaviors utilized by language learners to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and application of new knowledge."

Taking a Look at the Results of Language Learning

To assess ESL students' learning outcomes, teachers must keep track of their performance in class and provide them with ways to improve their language skills. Regular monitoring of academic performance is critical in the new normal of online learning to enhance the status of low-performing students and sustain the level of high-performing students. WhenManegre & Sabiri (2020) examined community college students' reflective notebooks, they observed that only high-achieving students keep track of their academic progress.

Studying in the New Normal: Psychological Challenges

Students' battles with anxiety, sadness, and other psychological difficulties are the challenges given by the new normal in education. During the new normal, students reported increased levels of depression, according to a web-based cross-sectional poll of 300 university students. 20% of those polled experienced relatively severe depression, and 23.1 percent felt severe anxiety. Academic and professional ambiguity and financial instability were some of the causes of these psychological problems (Islam et al., 2020). This means that ESL students may have mental health issues in addition to academic difficulties. A survey of 191 randomly selected teacher education students at a public institution confirmed the findings of Bozkurt & Sharma's

(2020) research. According to Cahapay (2020), more than 25% of teacher education students considered learning in the new normal to be challenging. According to the findings, there was also a positive and substantial association between respondents' motivation and stress levels. This suggests that the tension and anxiety during the epidemic pushed them to work harder in class.

SDL has been shown to positively impact distance learning in international and national research. Even though numerous research on SDL-related language acquisition has been undertaken internationally, such work is limited at the national level, particularly among ESL students who were future English language instructors during the new normal. As a result, this research aimed to serve as a springboard for future studies on the same problem in higher education.

Objectives of the Study

The goals of this research were to:

1. Determine the obstacles that collegiate self-directed language learners face in the new normal.
2. Identify the coping mechanisms utilized to deal with the difficulties.
3. Determine the advantages they obtained from using SDLL in the new normal.

Theoretical Framework

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) Chang (2021) served as the foundation for this research. It refers to the gap between what students can do on their own and what they can accomplish with the assist of someone more competent (Jie et al., 2020) until they achieve learning autonomy. According to Guseva&Solomonovich (2017), ZPD is one of the theories typically associated with second language acquisition, among many others. "The difference between the actual developmental level as assessed by autonomous issue solving and the degree of prospective development as indicated by problem-solving under adult supervision or in partnership with more competent peers," according to ZPD Chang (2021). Furthermore, the idea highlights that a student's language development differs when aided by a more competent adult, leading to favorable SDL consequences. ZPD and other socio-cultural theories influence students'

cognitive development in language acquisition.ZPD was chosen for this research because it focuses on what ESL students may do on their own to improve their language skills without the help of others. The next stage is when they are exposed to more complicated language learning principles, which need the support of a more competent peer, adult, or instructor. The final stage of language learning, where ESL students are expected to employ the taught language notion across disciplines, in communication, and in learning autonomy, which is also the objective of SDL, is the result of what they can accomplish alone and with the support of others.

Methodology
Research Design
A case study methodology was used in this qualitative investigation. ESL students from different public and private Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) were studied for their problems, coping techniques, and advantages. Although respondents' replies were subjective, the themes were objectively recognized based on their opinions, emotions, and experiences. Their language acquisition in the new normal was also investigated using a case study methodology. Suryana et al. (2021) claimed that "qualitative case studies are popular across the area of education" (p. 26) and that a case study differs in the boundedness of the case being researched, as well as the finiteness of the data collection. The current study was limited to 3rd and 4th year Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSE) English students whose first language was not English. Furthermore, data were collected on the problems, coping mechanisms, and rewards that the participants encountered or obtained using SDLL.

Participants of the Study
The study's participants were third- and fourth-year ESL students from various public and private universities. The public and private HEIs from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao were chosen using purposeful and convenience sampling strategies. The following were the inclusion criteria for the purposive sampling: (a) state universities and private sectarian universities and colleges; (b) with Bachelor of Secondary Education English programs; (c) with

third- or fourth-year BSE English majors who were ready to partake in the study; and (d) whose BSE English learners were willing to have a one-on-one video-recorded interview. Convenience sampling was also employed since the researchers obtained a list of HEIs from an official government website after determining the criteria. Letters of intent were sent to HEIs with email addresses on their official websites and suggested by the researchers' friends and colleagues. Three of the 12 HEIs authorized the data collection: one each from Luzon (ABC College-private), Visayas (DEF University-public), and Mindanao (DEF University-public) (GHI College-public).

The researchers obtained a list of learners from the HEIs' College of Education or Registrar after receiving consent from the HEIs. To remove bias, the researchers used a basic random sampling procedure in which they drew lots to choose actual participants from the list. Two language learners (Learners 1 and 5) came from ABC College in Luzon, three from DEF University in the Visayas (Learners 2, 3, and 4), and three from GHI College in Mindanao (Learners 6, 7, and 8). Except for Learners 7 and 8, who were in their fourth year as BSE English students, they were all in their third year. Three parents and three language instructors of the willingly participating individuals were also interviewed for triangulation. Females made up Learners 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8, while males made up Learners 2, 3, and 6. Teachers 1 and 3 were both females, but Teacher 2 was a man. The included parents were Learner 1's father and Learner 4's mother.

Learner 1 had a family problem that she kept private while Learner 2 lived with his extended family. Learner 3 worked part-time to support his personal needs, while Learner 4 was not living with her parents due to their jobs. Learner 5 lived with her mother and stepfather, Learner 6 worked as a mechanic to support himself and his siblings, Learner 7 was a single mother caring for her 2-year-old daughter, and Learner 8 lived in an area with extreme Intergenerational Discrimination.

Data Collection Tools
Data was gathered using a self-made, semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide was evaluated by four English language

specialists, three research professionals, and one major English learner to ensure appropriateness and validity. The first section was quite controlled, with brief and correct replies to get the participants' demographic profiles. The questions were year level, institution (public or private), number of years of English language exposure, and anticipated GPA. The second section consisted of a semi-structured interview guide based on the study's goals. It asked probing questions that challenged participants to tell tales rather than provide brief replies. Two sets of self-constructed, semi-structured interview instructions were created for parents and instructors. The advisor and one-panel member each verified the instruments. Five tough questions were included in both interview guides. During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked. Three Zoom interviews (2 learners and one parent) and nine Google Meet interviews (6 learners, one parent, and two teachers) were performed. One instructor was unable to be interviewed due to a busy schedule at school but provided written answers to the study questions. The interviews were one-on-one video recordings that lasted between 39 and 1 hour and 17 minutes. Parents were encouraged to speak Tagalog, while students and teachers responded in English as much as possible.

Data Analysis

Because the interviews were one-on-one, the transcripts were done separately. Phrases in Tagalog and Visayan have been translated into English. The key participants (ESL students) were interviewed initially. Following the transcription of these interviews, the researcher's advisor and one-panel member assessed guiding questions for triangulation. Initial codes were generated after transcribing all of the interviews, and these were filtered down to the final themes. Miles and Yang's (2021) paradigm for theme analysis were used in this study. According to Castleberry & Nolen (2018), thematic analysis, or coding data to produce themes, is a systematic procedure that assures that the themes formed match the case examined in the research. This implies that the coding must be done meticulously. Articles were reviewed by the researcher's advisor and methodologist, member-checked by the participants (8 students and three teachers), and adjusted based on their

feedback in this study. These efforts were taken to ensure that the topics, in this case, were reliable and relevant.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol code 2021-ERB-AUP-008 was assigned to the researchers after receiving approval from their Institutional Review Board. The participants were also given consent papers to sign, then retrieved before the interviews began.

Results

The findings indicated that college self-directed language learners struggle to consult with instructors, have logistical challenges and inadequate Internet connections, and are distracted by family responsibilities. They developedself-discipline, time-management skills,established contingency plans and built self-relianceto cope with these issues. Furthermore, they believed that studying in the new normal helped them achieve academic independence and self-motivation. Gender-appropriate pronouns were used in this section since the major and secondary individuals' genders were revealed.

College Self-Directed Language Learners Face Challenges in the New Normal

The three most visible obstacles they were encountering in the new normal, according to the participants, were difficulty consulting with professors, logistical concerns and inadequate Internet connections, and family responsibilities and diversions.

Consultation with Teachers is Difficult

Teachers are an essential element of students' ability to guide their learning. As mentioned by the ZPD theory, when learning gets challenging for learners and they believe they cannot accomplish it independently, the teacher's supervision is required (Silver & Zinsser, 2020). Instructors' engagement in learning became reduced due to the lack of face-to-face connection between instructors and learners. Participants in the new normal said they interacted with their instructors primarily via Messenger chat groups and emails (Learners 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8). Learners 2, 3, and 4 communicated via an intermediary, who was their section's student representative. The student representative was informed of the

student's concerns, and the student representative was the one who transmitted the information to their teachers. According to Teacher 2, this was done to avoid "bombarding" email addresses or chat groups with issues from various kids, mainly if several of them had the same worries.

During the epidemic, participants found it challenging to discuss with their professors since they were used to just seeing them during consultation hours or approaching them straight after class. On the other hand, the new normal established a barrier between students and instructors. Learners 3 and 6 indicated that language instructors were not always available, making it difficult to get help when they had fundamental problems that only their language teachers could solve. Learners 1 and 7, on the other hand, reported that since consulting with their language instructors was challenging, they chose not to ask too many questions and instead sought to comprehend things on their own.

According to Learner 6:

"Sometimes, hindikasinaminma contact yung teachers naminkasi busy sila," says Learner 6. Sometimes, Ma'am, since hindikotalaga maintin dihanyung lecture, self-directed language learning is necessary... It's difficult at times because hindi lahatngnasesearchmo is magbibigaysayong information, so kelanganmotalagang instructor mo's support. However, if there is no one available, Ma'am, kelanganmosyangmatutunanngikawlangtalaga"

[We are unable to call our professors due to their hectic schedules. Sometimes, Ma'am, since I don't grasp the lesson, so self-directed language learning... it isn't easy because not everything you seek will provide you with information, so you really need your teacher's direction. But if there aren't any, Ma'am, you'll have to figure it out on your own].

Teacher 3 demonstrated that this was one of language learners' difficulties in the new normal. She encouraged students to express their worries in their Messenger chat group since other students may have had similar queries and a single answer for everyone. It was also feasible for other students to respond to their peers' questions and offer ideas through the chat group. Teacher 3, on the other hand, agreed that raising questions or expressing concerns via chat groups

was rare. "They are worried that if they clear about the ideas, they would be regarded as slow learners," she suggests as a potential explanation. Despite this obstacle, the students discovered that their inability to consult with their professors helped them become more self-reliant and autonomous in their language study. All participants knew that their language acquisition was in the new normal. They had to figure out how to learn the lessons independently (Students 1 and 7) or search for information online when they encountered a problem (Students 3, 4, and 6).

Logistical Issues and Poor Internet Connections

Logistical concerns and bad Internet connectivity were also noticeable challenges for college self-directed language learners. Because the new normal necessitates digitization, a reliable Internet connection, consistent electrical supply, and favorable weather were all requirements. The learners' closeness to their houses seemed to likely cause Internet issues. Only three of the ten participants lived in a city. Others were in the suburbs, while others were in rural regions where a little rain had disrupted power and Internet service.

Because of a bad Internet connection, Learner 5 had to postpone her interview for this research twice, while Learner 8 had to reschedule hers three times. Learner 8 said that the most challenging aspect of the new normal is "the poor Internet connection," mainly because she was practicing teaching. It was particularly tough when she could not communicate with her students during a planned lesson. Learners 1 and 5 also stated that they had been abruptly disconnected from synchronous courses due to a bad Internet connection. "The Internet connection I have today is not consistent," Learner 2 lamented, "like it will be gone, completely, for hours... and when the Internet is gone, I don't have any way to attend courses" [sic].

Teachers 1, 2, and 3 agreed that the Internet connection is the worst setback of the new normal in theeducational system. Brownouts occurred at least once a week in Teacher 3's region of Mindanao, she said. There was no WiFi connectivity if there was no power. Intermittent signals were also produced by a bit

of change in the weather. This was a struggle for both the students and the instructors during the new normal. As a result, there was less need to utilize the Internet. Student 4's mother confirmed that her daughter needed to travel to the beach to get a more solid Internet connection on occasion, particularly during synchronous lessons in the new normal. "Kahit gabi nandun sya sa tabing dagat makakuha lang ng signal kasi ayaw nyang mahuli sya," said the mother of Student 4.

Family Commitments and Distractions

Aside from consultation concerns, logistical challenges, and Internet issues, language learners' family responsibilities and diversions at home were common topics. They said it was challenging to create limits in their roles as children, siblings, friends, and learners since they remained at home.

Learner 3, who lived with an extended family (immediate relatives and cousins), said that he had to fit his compulsory work in between domestic responsibilities such as cooking, washing, and teaching the younger cousins their modules, among other things. Learner 6, on the other hand, used his breaks at work as a mechanic to prepare for class or do asynchronous tasks. With three other siblings, Learner 6 is the breadwinner. He works as a mechanic while studying to aid his family with household bills and education. Meanwhile, Learner 7 said that as a single mother, she needs to sacrifice her early mornings to prepare for her practice teaching or to do other academics since her daughter is still sleeping and would not be disturbed. Learner 4, whose parents work on another island, is the sister, mother, and father of her 8-year-old brother. She helps her brother and another cousin with their assignments and performs all the housework.

Teacher 2 pointed out in the triangulation that language learners in the new normal encountered many distractions at home, making it difficult to concentrate on their schoolwork. Distractions may include anything from the availability of entertainment such as television or Netflix to the various roles that language learners were performing at home. They may be required to look after their younger siblings (Learners 1, 3, and 4), clean the house while their parents are away (Learners 2, 5, 7, and 8), or work to support themselves (Learner 6).

College Self-Directed Language Learners' Coping Strategies

On the other hand, the participants stressed that earlier difficulties might be overcome. They learned to manage their time and self-discipline, foster self-reliance, and make contingency plans to deal with the new regular's obstacles.

Developed Time-Management Skills and Self-discipline

According to all ten ESL college students, the top coping skills acquired during the new normal were time management and self-discipline. Time management skills and self-discipline were the most often gained abilities throughout the new normal. It was difficult for them to balance multiple academics and activities when at home, which was in some ways inconvenient for learning (Learner 2) since they tended to put off what needed to be done for their studies while they were at home. During the new normal, all participants remarked that they were better at managing their time. "Recently, I've been more responsible in my learning skills and duties as a student, as well as more disciplined in time management," said Learner 7. She completed her schoolwork, taught for her practice teaching, handled domestic chores, and cared for her three-year-old daughter.

Meanwhile, Learner 6 controlled his time by prioritizing his tasks and avoiding wasting time. He finished his schoolwork while he wasn't working at the repair shop. Learner 4, who had been living without her parents for three years, made sure she took care of her schoolwork, choir practice, and the responsibilities of being the older sister to her younger brother, who was also in primary school. There were several distractions at home, according to Learner 3, including domestic tasks, high-volume television, a loud neighborhood, evil siblings, a crowded house, and so on. Despite their difficulties when studying at home, they could achieve their objectives, complete their duties, and submit their work on or before the deadline.

Teachers 1, 2, and 3 agreed that college self-directed language learners gained time management skills throughout the new normal. Learners 2 and 3 also noted that ESL students, like themselves, performed various

responsibilities at home and should be accountable for fulfilling those tasks without jeopardizing their academics. Because Learner 1 had no instructor to oversee her, she would constantly postpone her work if she was not disciplined in managing her time. As a result, Learner 8 reminded the ESL college students that "time management is required in every module so that we [they] may deliver the final product ahead of schedule." Furthermore, Teacher 2 emphasized that instructors should educate students on how to "be disciplined with their time and examine what works best for them as a student" while still allowing them to work independently.

Learner 4's mother noted that being away from her for three years had a negative impact on her daughter's education in terms of time management. She stated the following:

Senior high school sya, lahatngmga personal nagamitnya, yungisusuotnya, akoangnaggawa nun. Sakanya is talagangpag-aaral. Ngayonnahihirapansyagawangwalaakongayon.

"Ma, ibatalagapagnandyan ka kasi..." kaya sinasabinya. Lahatkumbagangayon eh, yungisusuotnyaiisipin pa nya eh lalokasamasyasa chorale. Yung time nanauubosna[I do all of her personal stuff, such as what she'll dress, before she starts senior high.] She needs to concentrate only on her schoolwork. Now that I am not present, she is having difficulty deciding what to dress, particularly because she is a member of the chorale. She has run out of time].

Cultivated Self-Reliance

To overcome the challenge of consulting with instructors, self-directed language learners in college developed self-reliance. They learned to deal with the majority of their problems on their own. SDLL in the new normal meant total self-reliance for language acquisition for all participants. In the new normal, ESL college students' language learning demonstrated no face-to-face connection with instructors and classmates and decreased engagement of professors and classmates. As a result, they saw SDLL as taking the initiative to learn independently (Learner 8) with or without the assistance of others (Learners 2, 4, and 6).

Learner 1 stressed that she seldom questioned her instructor about the teachings during the new normal; instead, she attempted to find solutions independently, depending on her ability. Because she was "afraid to ask" inquiries, Learner 7 did the same. Learner 3, on the other hand, believed that asking his professors all the time was not a brilliant idea since they were busy preparing for different courses and upgrading to acquire their master's or doctor's degree. These worries prompted students to depend on themselves and explore alternative ways to grasp their lectures better; as a result, they learned how to utilize the Internet effectively via research. Because "napakaliit lang ng contact ng instructor [there is very little engagement with the teacher] thus you are...asked or may be compelled to learn by yourself," the participants' self-reliance grew under the new normal (Learner 3). As a result, ESL college students discovered methods to "tailor their study to their requirements" (Learner 5) so that they may "gradually control their learning; adapt it to individual abilities such as studying and understanding courses on their own" [sic] (Learner7).

Because of his job, Learner 1's father stated that he could not oversee his daughter's academics; nonetheless, he was confident that Learner 1 was highly dedicated to her studies and worked hard to achieve success. Learner 1 lives in the Visayas with her younger brother while her parents work on Luzon. According to her mother, learner 1 grew more responsible for herself, her brother, and their schoolwork. Professors 2 and 3 emphasized that ESL college students who used SDLL acquired self-reliance and did not need constant supervision from their teachers. Teacher 2 commented, "Since self-directed language learning langsya, Hindi masyadong required ang presence ng instructor [since it is simply self-directed language learning, the presence of the teacher is not as important]."

Teacher 1 further emphasized that language instructors' responsibility is to provide "appropriate direction and reminders" to keep students on track as they "search new tactics that will fit their learning requirements when they deploy SDLL, particularly in the new normal." This was because their professors or classmates were not always present to assist them, and this

would benefit the kids in the long term in their lifetime learning.

Prepared Contingency Plans

Due to logistical challenges and lousy Internet connectivity, participants learned to think of contingency plans. One contingency plan agreed upon by the ten players was to have an additional mobile data load. Another option was to look for a location with a more reliable Internet connection (Learners 4, 6, and 7). Others would travel to a relative's or a friend's residence where the Internet connection was better (Learners 1 and 5). Learner 8 said during the interview that a bit of rain in her region would break the Internet connection, causing her to miss her teaching practice. Because of this issue, she had to "apologize to my students" virtually every day. Learner 4's mother confirmed that her daughter needed to travel to the beach to get a more reliable Internet connection on occasion, mainly if there was a synchronous session. On the other hand, language professors frequently provided resources that ESL college students could download and read even offline (Teachers 1, 2, and 3). Learner 2 also said that his language professors filmed their lessons and enabled students to download them for subsequent viewing without worrying about an unreliable Internet connection.

Participants' Gained Benefits from Language Learning in the New Normal

All students, especially language learners, were taken aback by the new normal. When questioned about their perspectives on language acquisition in the new normal, the participants said that the new typical educational environment gave them (a) self-motivation and (b) academic freedom. Challenges were addressed with varied proactive tactics because self-directed language learners identified ways to adjust to changes.

Self-Motivation

For ESL college students, COVID-19 was a struggle. Learner 3 said that his mental health worsened due to the epidemic as he adjusted to it. He was terrified and anxious when the COVID-19 crisis began. He was concerned about his family's health and worried about students' lives under the new normal. He did say, though, that he was feeling better today. This seems to have occurred to Learner 1, who acquired confidence in her language skills through writing—although she was not depressed, studying in the new normal was boring for her and put her mental resilience to the test. She was advised to start a Facebook profile to share supportive remarks throughout the new normal. As an ESL student, she profited from this activity, and she also inspired others to be more resilient and optimistic in the face of the epidemic. "Just in these epidemic times ma'am, since di ba there are some sufferers of depression...on that page, ma'am, I want everyone who will be reading my ideas, ma'am, receiving some encouragement or inspiration" [sic], said Learner 1. Learner 7 also saw the necessity of her daughter conquering the new usual hurdles. She said that she wanted to provide a better life for her daughter and that being a single mother added to the difficulty, but she persisted in completing what she began. In June 2021, she was set to graduate. Learner 4 constantly telling herself that "walaakongibangaasahankundisarili" [I have no one else to turn to for assistance but myself]. She also said that thinking about her parents' struggles, in which they decided to be away from their children to care for their necessities, made her understand that she had no right to ignore her education. As a result, the participants considered several motivating aspects that would enable them to persevere and face the difficulties of the new normal.

Employing SDLL in their learning helped the students and their parents and instructors. When asked whether they had ever had any school-related issues with Learners 1 and 4, the father of Learner 1 and the mother of Learner 4 disagreed, claiming that they had never been called by the school head or any instructors for any concern about their children's academics. Learner 1's mother said that she and her husband were proud of Learner 4. All of their sacrifices, including being separated from their two children, were rewarded by their children's hard work at school throughout the epidemic, even though they were unable to oversee them. Learner 1's father, on the other hand, indicated that during the new normal, his daughter's home troubles did not hamper her or force her to abandon her responsibilities as a student.

Teachers 2 and 3 stressed that despite the many problems of adjusting to the new normal, ESL college students worked hard to complete their programs, whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated.

Many of her language learners have become resilient, adaptable, cheerful, and resourceful as a result of the new normal, according to Teacher 1. They devised strategies to cope with their challenges, making the situation acceptable. In addition, Learner 1's father remarked that in the new normal, he saw his daughter's kasigasigan (diligence) in her academics.

Academic Independence

Participants achieved academic independence in addition to self-motivation. The ESL college students obtained implicit independence due to their professors' limited engagement and lack of cooperation with their classmates. Learner 4 claimed that since there was no instructor to "explain to you what you have to accomplish" in the new normal, "you depend totally on yourself," which Learners 3 and 8 agreed with. "I learn to grow myself; therefore, I learn to comprehend with my own...," Student 6 explained. I learn to work alone rather than face-to-face, occasionally collaborating with my peers. So now I have to... totally on my own... concentrate diligently on the items necessary to complete the lesson" [sic].

The participants said that they completed their tasks on their own (Learners 2 & 4), seldom sought assistance from their professors (Learners 3, 6, 7, & 8), and used the Internet for ideas and solutions to their difficulties (Learners 1, 4, & 5). Despite their professors ' inability to accommodate them, they also learned how to self-evaluate their learning to determine whether it was progressing. "I take online grammar tests to verify my progress in grammar, and then...that determines where I am at or on the technical side of that language [sic]" (Learner No. 4). Learners 2 and 3, on the other hand, acknowledged consulting the criteria or rubrics again. "I instantly go back to the criteria... and to view other works, Ma'am, so that I may compare whatever section of our paper is different, Ma'am [sic]" (Learner No. 2). They were able to learn independently with the support of these tactics. Their marks from completing each

activity confirmed that what they had done was proper.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The data demonstrated that ESL college students were forced to depend entirely on themselves in the new normal. Even though professors and students were eager to aid, the environment made it tough to do so. The most visible obstacles that college self-directed language learners had in the new normal were difficulty consulting with instructors, practical concerns, inadequate Internet connections, and family responsibilities and diversions. They acquired contingency planning, self-reliance, and time-management skills to guarantee that their language acquisition was not threatened due to these problems. Aside from the literary elements and the outcomes, the demographic profiles revealed that each participant was in a unique position, contributing to their difficulties transitioning to the new normal. Regardless of their circumstances, they all gained academic independence and self-motivation in the new normal. The findings revealed ZPD, a condition in which language learners strive to complete tasks independently unless they need support from a more educated person or in the new normal, internet sources and services to help them learn. Their ultimate objective was to become autonomous students who were resilient in the face of adversities in various educational environments.

Based on these findings, ESL college students are advised to acquire SDLL and become more digitally savvy to face the problems posed by the pandemic. To assist language learners in their SDLL, language instructors should give short information, instruction or recommendations, and fast feedback. Furthermore, parents and family members are advised to offer space and time at home to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous sessions for ESL college students. Despite the pressing demand, curriculum architects must be quick-witted in developing a language learning curriculum that is holistic, learner-centered, and ready for the new normal. This will assist curriculum implementers (teachers) and curriculum beneficiaries (students) get the most out of their language instruction and learning. Finally, since this is a

qualitative study, it cannot be generalized; thus, future researchers should do quantitative research employing the emergent themes as variables. Factors like the learning materials offered by the instructor and the respondents' mental toughness may also be taken into account.

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