

Research paper

## Investigating EFL Learners' Perspectives on Online Education and its Relationship with their Personality Traits

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of distance education as a method of learning had great impacts on educational prospects. Meanwhile, the global pandemic of COVID-19 brought about an international emergency in online education which caused lots of attention to studies on different aspects of online education. This study aimed to investigate Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on online education courses in language institutes. Moreover, the relationship between learners' perspectives on online education and their personality traits was examined. A total of 134 EFL learners completed a personality questionnaire developed by Gosling et al. (2003) and a questionnaire to investigate the learners' perspectives towards online education. The results indicated that EFL learners generally approved of the effectiveness of the approach and their study habits; while, they undervalued the personal suitability and teachability of online learning. Also, this study explored the relationship between learners' perspectives on online education and their personality traits and found a positive correlation between personal suitability and conscientiousness, extroversion, and emotional stability, respectively.

**Keywords:** Distance education, EFL learners, learners' perceptions, personality traits.

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### **Introduction**

The emergence of distance education as a method of learning had great impacts on educational prospects. In many parts of the world, this method has gained an undeniable role in formal and

informal education. With the worldwide spread of the internet, distance education has been mostly implemented in the form of online education, and nowadays; online courses use different platforms to offer their instructions. There are many advantages to distance education. As for learners, they choose it for reasons such as avoiding travel time to class and scheduling problems (Horspool & Lange, 2012), work commitments, and flexibility of use of time and location (Alam, et al., 2012), and other daily commitments along with limited choices of traditional classes (Hannay & Newvine, 2006).

The worldwide pandemic had great impacts on distance education; before that, online education had been mostly an optional method; learners chose online courses as they might best suit their needs and wants. However, In the time of the Covid-19 pandemic which began in 2019, it became a widely used approach of education as a means to control further distribution of the illness. Many governments closed down schools and there was a sudden and mandatory shift to distance/online education. This was also the case for many cities in Iran. Iran's Ministry of Education announced that schools have to close down and introduced a national online platform to be used as the official educational application. In addition to this official application, many private schools used other online platforms to offer more convenient ways of teaching.

There are a number of differences between online education in normal situations and emergency situations including it are no more alternative, i.e. all face-to-face education is eliminated; learners are less serious and interested; families are involved in the instruction; etc. (Al Lily, et al., 2020). Therefore, this emergency online learning once again drew researchers' attention to the topic and they tried to investigate different aspects of online education to help improve its effectiveness.

The effectiveness of distance education is dependent on many factors including the quality and availability of the educational apps and platforms, the teaching method and resources, the perceptions of users about that, and also the personality traits investigated in this study. It is believed that pre-existing mindsets may play roles in deciding whether a learner will be victorious, and capable of dealing successfully with the fact of a distance instruction understanding (Irani et al., 2003). In the case of emergency online education this factor may be investigated more precisely since learners have no other option but to take online courses.

Generally, there have been many studies investigating aspects of distance/online education. They have focused on various issues such as the importance and necessity of distance/online education (Al-Worafi, 2024; Culduz, 2024; Kubikova, et al., 2024; Nuri, 2022), satisfaction with online learning (Baharin, et al., 2015; Lin, & Wang, 2024; Markus, et al., 2024, Roach & Lemasters, 2006; Zhu, et al., 2024), learners' motivation for online learning (Shih, et al., 2013), effect of personality traits on the sensation of an online course and learners' perceptions and views of online learning (Irani et al., 2003; Kara, et al. , 2024; Kaspar, et al., 2024), etc. Among these topics exploring the reasons why a distance education program becomes effective is of much importance since it helps improve the application and details of the programs. In this regard the effect of learners' personalities and their perceptions on the success of a distance education program has been an important issue to study; the learners' perceptions of an approach can affect the success of the course and it can be correlated with aspects of learners' personalities. The relationship between learners' personalities and their perceptions has been attended in a few studies; a study by Shih et al. (2013) suggested that online satisfaction was associated with personality traits and the significant traits among the Big Five in forecasting satisfaction and motivation were the traits of extraversion and conscientiousness. However, there has been no study

conducted on the effect of personality traits on learners' perspectives towards distance English language learning in the EFL context in the time of a pandemic leading to mandatory distance/online education.

This study aims to analyze EFL learners' perspectives on online education and the effect of their personality traits on their opinions. Thus, the investigation addressed the following research questions:

- What are Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding the four dimensions of personal suitability, effectiveness, teachability, and study habits?
- Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' perspectives on online education and their personality traits?

## **Literature Review**

### **Distance Education**

According to Anderson and Simpson (2023), distance education is a method of teaching where the teacher and learner are physically isolated. It can combine a succession of technologies, including the computer, video, correspondence, audio, and the Internet. Allen and Seaman (2003) believed that online education as a subcategory of distance education is when at least eighty percent of the lesson content is supplied online.

As a widely used method of teaching, distance education has been used for formal and informal education since print technology was introduced to the world (Anderson, & Rivera Vargas, 2020). With the broadcasts' development technologies such as radio and television and later on computers, the use of this method increased. The Introduction of the World Wide Web made a great impact; The online world was the best opportunity to demonstrate its privileges and importance. Online teaching was no longer a tendency, although the mainstream (Kentnor, 2015).

The increasing importance of the method caused worldwide attention to it by researchers. In this regard, de Souza Rodrigues et al. (2021) explored e-Learning adoption. They recognized ten general constructs in the Brazilian higher education ecosystem that simultaneously impact distinct stakeholders in their preference to adopt eLearning. Strong et al. (2012) concluded that assignment types that apply cooperation among learners and create genuine learning experiences that align with learner interests will enhance the learning environment, learners' social presence, and learner satisfaction in eLearning classes. Wang (2003) developed a model and tool for estimating student satisfaction with asynchronous e-learning systems and examined the reliability and validity of it. Al Lily et al. (2020) introduced a conceptual framework on the Arab domain for distance education. Bayram et al. (2008) discovered a significant relationship between students' academic accomplishment in a web-based setting, personality traits, and perspectives toward web-based instruction.

Furthermore, the impact of the outbreak on the use of distance/online education brought about its topics. Abbasi et al. (2020) studied the learners' perceptions about e-learning during COVID-19. They found that seventy-seven percent of learners had negative perceptions towards e-learning. The findings of Aguilera-Hermida (2020) showed how self-efficacy, technology use, and motivation played an influential function in the academic performance of learners and cognitive engagement. Alhumaid et al. (2020) investigated the instructors' perceptions in the time of the pandemic toward acceptance of e-learning in developing countries. Their conclusions displayed a positive relationship between e-learning and technology acceptance.

## **Personality Traits**

Personality as a very extensive part of psychology, has always been an important factor in analyzing different aspects of human lives. However, it has not been easy to give it a widely acknowledged definition. Bergner (2020) tries and states the following definition of personality: An individual's personality is the enduring set of styles and traits that he or she exhibits, which characteristics illustrate (a) dispositions of this person, and (b) ways in which this person varies from the standard normal person in his or her society.

A number of verified questionnaires were developed in an attempt to present a scale for personality traits. They analyze five main components of personality, including openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (or emotionality) (called the Big Five). These components are believed to be stable and a result of one's genetics rather than the impact of the environment.

Many inquiries investigate the impact of personality traits on other aspects of human life, such as dysfunctional behaviors, job performance, leadership, academic performance (Tomšik, 2018), emotional intelligence, learning perceptions, motivation, etc. The relationship between personality traits and online education has been addressed by some researchers. Jensen (2015) reviewed the relationship between academic achievement, learning, and personality traits. One of his findings was that openness had a relationship with general knowledge and learning, whereas academic achievement was related to conscientiousness. Results of a study by Shih et al. (2013) indicated that online satisfaction was correlated with personality traits and traits of conscientiousness and extraversion were the two influential traits among the Big Five in foretelling satisfaction and motivation. The findings of a study of the role of personality traits in web-based education demonstrated that personality traits explained about 52.7% of attitudes toward web-based

education and fifty-three percentage of academic achievement (Bayram et al.,2008). Siddiquei and Khalid (2018) investigated the relationship between learning styles and personality traits. They concluded that extraversion was positively associated with all four learning styles, while neuroticism was negatively linked to all four learning styles. In this regard, teachers' teaching personality had a significant relationship with teaching style. Extraversion and agreeableness personalities had a significant relationship with expert, formal authority, personal model, facilitator, and delegator teaching styles due to a similar high correlation (Basyirah et al., 2021). Additionally, based on the results of Akbarzade Farkhan (2021), Iranian teachers do not have the same personality types. Extroversion, intuition, thinking, and judging personality types were dominant among Iranian teachers in learning a language.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The study participants were students from two English language institutes in Mashhad, Iran. There were female learners. EFL learners were selected from the intermediate level and above. All of these learners participated in this study voluntarily.

### **Instrumentation**

The data was collected by means of two questionnaires. The short version of the Big Five personality questionnaire developed by Gosling et al. (2003) and a questionnaire to investigate the learners' perspectives towards distance education developed by Yıldırım et al. (2014) as adopted and used by Altunay (2019).

The Big-Five Model (Goldberg, 1993) proposes that most individual differences in human personality can be classified into five broad, empirically derived domains, including extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Gosling et al., 2013). There are different verified and available measures for the Big Five. For this research, the author used the Ten Item Personality Measure (TIPI) developed by Gosling et al. (2013) because the author needed a verified Persian translation of a short personality measure; furthermore, there is evidence indicating that TIPI is an appropriate measure of the Big-Five model, for instance, it showed high temporal stability ( $r_s = 0.62-0.77$ ), and strong correlations with longer personality trait measures, such as BFI ( $r_s > 0.65$ ) (Nunes et al., 2018). The Persian version of TIPI was retrieved from Gosling's official website. This measure has been used with adequate reliability and validity in Iran (Khodayarifard & Akbari-Zardkhaneh, 2017). The respondents chose their answers on a Likert scale.

The data for investigating learners' views towards online education was gathered from a questionnaire adapted from Yıldırım et al. (2014) as used by Altunay (2019) to explore the students' opinions about distance education. Altunay adapted the questionnaire for distance EFL students for his study. The questionnaire was comprised of 18 items that were associated with teachability, effectiveness, personal suitability, and study habits. The items 1 to 6 were associated with personal suitability, effectiveness (Items 7-11), teachability (Items 12-15), and study habits (Items 16-18).

## **Procedure**

The two questionnaires were uploaded to a survey website to be answered online, and its link was sent to more than 300 students. After two days, 134 correct questionnaires were collected to

analyze the data. The analysis was done using SPSS 24.0 and Pearson Correlation, which can be used when we desire to examine the strength of the relationship between two or more continuous variables (Pallant, 2020). This provides us with the strength of the relationship between variables and an indication of both directions (positive or negative).

The reliability of the TIPI personality questionnaire and attitude questionnaire were calculated using Cronbach Alpha reliability. The reliability of the first questionnaire turned out to be 0.875, and the second one turned out to be 0.864, which is considered a high-reliability index.

## Results

Descriptive statistics for each item of the attitude questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Learners' Perspectives on Online Education*

Items	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Undecided %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1. It is convenient for me to learn English through distance education.	23.1	28.7	18.3	23.8	6.1
2. Learning English through distance education is suitable for my lifestyle.	19.5	20.7	27.5	25.6	6.7
3. Distance learning is a suitable alternative to obtain the English education I need.	15.2	28	26.9	23.8	6.1
4. Distance learning allows me to learn English without losing time.	15.9	25	23.2	27.4	8.5
5. I need the flexibility of participating the lesson without time and place constraints.	9.7	6.7	37.8	34.7	10.1
6. It is difficult for me to go to school to study.	44	30.6	15.3	6.1	4
7. Distance learning makes the student more active in terms of learning English.	20.1	33	25.6	15.8	5.5
8. Distance education offers the opportunity to do various activities to learn English.	12.8	17.1	27.4	34.7	8
9. Distance education allows students to learn English at their own pace.	14	22.5	23.8	31.7	8

10. Those learned in English classes are internalized thanks to distance education.	7.3	16.5	53	17.1	6.1
11. Distance learning is more effective than traditional education.	30.5	28	23.2	14	4.3
12. Face-to-face interaction is necessary for best English learning.	1.8	5.5	12.2	35.4	45.1
13. Communication in face-to-face English learning is more instant and clearer than in distance learning.	3.7	3.7	10.4	34.1	48.1
14. English education is offered better through traditional education compared to distance education.	5.4	6.1	22	28	38.5
15. I need face-to-face communication to learn English.	3.6	7.9	22	27.5	39
16. I have the habit of postponing to accomplish the given assignments or exercises.	28.7	25.6	23.1	16.5	6.1
17. Most of the time, I do not finish the homework or exercises given.	34.8	26.8	18.9	14	5.5
18. I wait until the last moment to do my homework or to study for the exams.	19.5	19.5	29.3	19.5	12.2

The outcomes of the investigation for each analysis question are displayed below:

What are Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding the four dimensions of personal suitability, effectiveness, teachability, and study habits?

1. What are Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding personal suitability?

The questionnaire items 1 to 6 were associated with the personal suitability dimension of EFL learning through online education. As Table 1 showed in items 1 to 4, EFL learners' perspectives on online education were strongly disagreed and disagreed. More than fifty percent of participants (51.8%) believed that it was not convenient to learn English through online education. In this way, 40.2% of participants said that learning English through online education was not suitable for their lifestyle. Distance learning was not a suitable alternative to obtain the English education they needed, which was confirmed by 43.2% of participants. Most study participants disagreed that distance learning allows me to learn English without losing time. Regarding item 6, 74.6% of

participants said it was not difficult to go to school to study. However, in item 5, participants' perspectives changed toward online education by expressing the agreement of 44.8% with the flexibility of participating in the lesson.

2. What are Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding effectiveness?

The questionnaire items 7 to 11 were associated with the effectiveness dimension of EFL learning through online education. As Table 1 showed in items 7 and 11, EFL learners' perspectives on online education were strongly disagreed and disagreed. More than fifty percent of participants (53.1%) believed that distance learning did not make the learners more active in terms of learning English. In this way, 58.5% of participants in item 11 said that distance learning was not more effective than traditional education. Distance education offered the opportunity to do various activities to learn English, which was confirmed by 42.7% of participants. Most study participants, 39.7%, agreed that distance education allowed students to learn English at their own pace. However, in item 10, participants' perspectives were undecided about those learned in English classes were internalized thanks to distance education by expressing the undecided by 53%.

3. What are Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding teachability?

The questionnaire items 12 to 15 were associated with the teachability dimension of EFL learning through online education. As Table 1 showed in items 12 to 15, EFL learners' perspectives on online education were strongly disagreed and disagreed. More than fifty percent of participants (80.5%) believed that face-to-face interaction was necessary for best English learning. In this way, 82.2% of participants said that communication in face-to-face English learning was more instant and clearer than in distance learning. English education was offered better through traditional education compared to distance education, which was affirmed by 66.5% of participants. Most

study participants (66.5%) agreed that they needed face-to-face communication to learn English. In general, participants expressed the necessity of face-to-face education in learning English.

4. What are Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding study habits?

The questionnaire items 16 to 18 were associated with the study habits dimension of EFL learning through online education. As Table 1 showed in items 16 to 17, EFL learners' perspectives on online education were strongly disagreed and disagreed. More than fifty percent of participants (54.3%) believed that they did not have the habit of postponing to accomplish the given assignments or exercises. In this way, 61.6% of participants said that most of the time, they finished the homework or exercises given. However, in item 18, participants' perspectives disagreed that they waited until the last moment to do their homework or to study for the exams by expressing the disagreement by 39%.

The outcomes of the investigation for the second research question are displayed in Table 2. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' perspectives on online education and their personality traits?

The results of the study regarding the relationship between EFL learners' perspectives on online education and learners' personality traits are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Correlations of Learners' Personality Traits and Their Perspectives on Online Education*

	Personal Suitability	Effectiveness	Teachability	Study habits
Extroversion	0.65	0.43	-.19	0.08
Agreeableness	0.38	0.40	0.35	0.19
Conscientiousness	0.72	0.41	-.11	0.16
Emotional stability	0.61	0.30	0.02	0.22
Openness to experience	0.17	-.20	0.29	0.18

As shown in Table 2, there was a high positive correlation between conscientiousness and personal suitability (0.72). Also, there was a high positive correlation between personal suitability and extroversion (0.65) and emotional stability (0.61), respectively. Furthermore, all personality traits except for openness to experience were moderately correlated with aspects of personal suitability and effectiveness. Agreeableness was also moderately correlated with teachability. Finally, there was no significant correlation between openness to experience and any dimensions of learners' perspectives on online education.

## **Discussion**

The first research question regarding Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on online education revealed that EFL learners had various perspectives on the dimensions of personal suitability, effectiveness, teachability, and study habits. The research question regarding Iranian EFL learners' perspectives on the personal suitability dimension of online education revealed that they generally undervalued personal suitability. This analysis differed from Sancenon et al. (2022) elaborated that online learning allows learners to personalize their educational process in a way that better suits their circumstances.

Also, EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding effectiveness displayed that they did not have an explicit opinion since EFL learners believed that distance learning did not make them more active in terms of learning English. Moreover, they expressed that distance learning was not more effective than traditional education. In contrast, EFL learners thought that distance education offered the opportunity to do various activities to learn English and allowed students to learn English at their own pace.

Moreover, as the results of this investigation indicate, EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding teachability showed that they undervalued the teachability dimension of online education because face-to-face communication to learn English had more significance for them. Along these lines, Fernandez-Malpartida (2023) explained that half of university students declared a preference for face-to-face instruction, while the remaining participants were in favor of online education and integrating both learning environments.

EFL learners' perspectives on online education regarding study habit declared that they moderately approved their own study habit. In sum, the effectiveness of online teaching was highly estimated rather than other dimensions of online education. The results of this study differ from Altunay (2019), in which he investigated the learners' views and concluded that they were mostly undecided and did not have a precise view of the effectiveness, teachability of distance education, personal suitability, and study habits.

Moreover, the findings of this study were not in line with those of Abbasi et al. (2020), who reported that learners had negative perceptions towards e-learning. According to the results of this study, most of the participants agreed with the flexibility of participating in the lesson without time and place constraints. This finding is consistent with the flexibility that comes with online education in terms of time and location (Abidah et al., 2020; Uzorka (2024); Uzorka et al., 2023; Yessenova et al., 2023).

Regarding the second research question, there was a positive correlation between personal suitability and conscientiousness, extroversion, and emotional stability, respectively. In this way, the learners' personality traits were effective in how EFL learners assessed their experience of online education. The results were in line with those by Shih et al. (2013), who concluded that conscientiousness and extroversion dimensions of personality traits affected learners' satisfaction

with online education. Furthermore, the study findings were in accordance with Kaspar et al. (2024), who concluded that students' personality traits were less important for most online learning experiences.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, it is essential to know that the perceptions of the learners influence the success of an online course; therefore, the results of the present study may suggest that in today's world in which online education is becoming a prominent means of education, there should be more emphasis on finding about personality traits of learners and trying to reconsider different aspects of online education details to achieve the more suitable understanding toward learners' personality traits. Besides, the results of this study assist teachers in understanding learners' needs in detail according to the 18 items of the attitude questionnaire, and provide them with an efficient, supportive learning setting that coordinates with EFL learners' perspectives on online education. A future key concern of those who are in charge of material designers and policymakers might be updating EFL teachers to contribute to the improvement of the EFL learners' perspectives on online education, both theoretically and practically. Future studies could concentrate on technical and pedagogical support to identify the learners' needs and to adapt the learning context accordingly.

The results of the study include pedagogical implications; nevertheless, it contains several limitations. For instance, one of the study's limitations is that it covers Iranian institutional EFL learners. Future research can be done within university contexts and other public school settings to generalize the conclusions. Another limitation is that the participants in the analysis were 134, and they were all female. For future investigations, it would be worthwhile to contain male learners

and repeat the analysis on more extensive populations. Moreover, this study concentrated on the variables of students' perception of online education and personality traits. Exploring other related variables across diverse learning contexts is recommended for prospective studies.

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## Appendix 1

### Ten-Item Personality Inventory-(TIPI)

Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

Disagree strongly	Disagree moderately	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree moderately	Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I see myself as:

1. \_\_\_\_ Extraverted, enthusiastic.
  2. \_\_\_\_ Critical, quarrelsome.
  3. \_\_\_\_ Dependable, self-disciplined.
  4. \_\_\_\_ Anxious, easily upset.
  5. \_\_\_\_ Open to new experiences, complex.
  6. \_\_\_\_ Reserved, quiet.
  7. \_\_\_\_ Sympathetic, warm.
  8. \_\_\_\_ Disorganized, careless.
  9. \_\_\_\_ Calm, emotionally stable.
  10. \_\_\_\_ Conventional, uncreative.
- 

TIPI scale scoring (“R” denotes reverse-scored items):

Extraversion: 1, 6R; Agreeableness: 2R, 7; Conscientiousness: 3, 8R; Emotional Stability: 4R, 9;  
Openness to Experiences: 5, 10R.

## Appendix 2

### EFL Learners' perspectives of Online Education Questionnaire

Please read the statements and choose the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. It is convenient for me to learn English through distance education.
2. Learning English through distance education is suitable for my lifestyle.
3. Distance learning is a suitable alternative to obtain the English education I need.
4. Distance learning allows me to learn English without losing time.
5. I need the flexibility of participating the lesson without time and place constraints.
6. It is difficult for me to go to school to study.
7. Distance learning makes the student more active in terms of learning English.
8. Distance education offers the opportunity to do various activities to learn English.
9. Distance education allows students to learn English at their own pace.
10. Those learned in English classes are internalized thanks to distance education.
11. Distance learning is more effective than traditional education.
12. Face-to-face interaction is necessary for best English learning.
13. Communication in face-to-face English learning is more instant and clearer than in distance learning.
14. English education is offered better through traditional education compared to distance education.
15. I need face-to-face communication to learn English.
16. I have the habit of postponing to accomplish the given assignments or exercises.
17. Most of the time, I do not finish the homework or exercises given.
18. I wait until the last moment to do my homework or to study for the exams.

**Bio data**

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