

## A Comparison of EFL Learners' Level of Satisfaction in Online Language Classes with Face-to-Face Classes: Challenges and Obstacles

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### Abstract

The present study explored EFL learners' satisfaction with different aspects of the online learning context. Moreover, it tried to investigate learners' attitude towards the challenges and obstacles of online learning. Also, the possible differences between male and female learners' attitudes towards online learning contexts were assessed. To achieve this end, the researchers adopted survey research as a quantitative method with a sample of 75 intermediate students of both genders. It is worthy to mention that the participants of the study experienced online learning through Google Meet during a term. By the end of the term, the selected EFL learners were provided with two related questionnaires and they were asked to answer the items carefully. The first questionnaire explored EFL learners' satisfaction with online learning environment, and the second one investigated the participants' views on challenges and obstacles of such a context. The data were collected and moved to SPSS software and the outputs were discussed and represented. Based on the findings, the students indicated a high level of satisfaction with online learning. Additionally, the students' negative attitude was observed towards the challenges and obstacles of online contexts. Also, no difference was seen in the males' and females' attitudes towards online learning contexts.

*Keywords:* E-learning, Online Learning, Learner's Satisfaction, EFL Context;

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, instruction has begun to change from the face-to-face classroom to online learning settings. Online learning has become an important issue in the teaching context and provides particular advantages

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in the learning process (Appana, 2008; Shopova, 2014). Online learning is a learner-centered environment in which the students control their own learning pace, and activities can be flexible to better suit a student's preferred learning style. It also creates opportunities for active learning. Considering suitable online learning software or applications, students have opportunities to take part in discussions, express views, and share their knowledge regardless of classroom size and time (Kuama, 2016). More importantly, educational decision-makers and course designers from a wide range of educational institutions have expressed growing interest in the implementation of online instruction (Dawley, 2007; Fish & Gill, 2009).

Online learning has been playing a very important and essential role in educational systems during the past years. The quick expansion of the gap between learning offline and online has made a great change in the strategies and concepts of teaching and learning. The teaching and learning processes are not only limited to a traditional classroom in which face-to-face meeting becomes a priority. The development in distance learning has minimized the existence of face-to-face meetings by implementing blended learning or even totally changed it into full online learning. English language learning practices have been shifting from face-to-face classes to digital or online classes. This difference in method sparks questions about students' perceptions of the new system (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020).

In response to the pandemic of Covid-19 at the beginning of 2020, many countries try out the implementation of EFL online classes. At first, schools and universities were encouraged to alter conventional classes into online classes. Afterwards, all schools and universities have been suggested to turn the face-to-face classes into online ones for a longer period. Teaching a language has many different features. A teacher does not only teach and pay attention to students' language skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, but also helps, facilitates, and encourages students to have enthusiasm, good attitudes, and motivation towards English. Furthermore, teachers have to understand what students learn, how and why such learning influences them, how lessons could be beneficial for them in the future (Derakhshan, 2015).

Hence, language teaching requires teachers to teach students to develop both academic and personal abilities. Due to distance teaching, teachers and learners face new challenges and restrictions in their teaching and learning jobs. Lack of the required access to suitable materials, required interaction, group and peer collaboration may exert new problems for the learners who may be disappointed and demotivated in terms of their language learning. Moreover, lack of suitable technological facilities such

as laptops, smartphones, access to the internet are among problems that the learners normally face. Thus, it is important to explore the most important problems and difficulties that learners face when they are exposed to online teaching and learning. The problems already exist among other nationalities that have to experience distance teaching. Ulmer, Watson, and Derby (2007) examined perceptions of faculty members of the value of distance education and reported statistically significant differences in findings between faculty members with and without distance education experience. Their results suggest that experienced faculty view distance education as effective in terms of student performance and instructor-to-student interaction, and they promote and recommend engagement in distance education.

Providing EFL learners with enough input required for any successful communication is the major goal of most language classes, and this objective can be achieved via employing suitable teaching procedures. Online learning has been playing a very important and essential role in education systems during the past years. As Lee (2001) stated, in new learning environment students need time to adapt to some of the new challenges they will encounter. The new context may be problematic for students who are not skilled in the use of technology. That is to say, without the instructors and classmates, when students need instant support to clarify some challenges that may arise, they might experience a level of anxiety and frustration. To come to a closer identification of the possible problems and challenges which are existed in the new context of learning, the researchers focused on the online learning environment during a term and tried to explore the students' level of satisfaction and their attitudes towards unexpected challenges and obstacles they might face with them.

The present work focused on the students' views towards the online learning environment. The study followed three main objectives. First, it aims at exploring EFL learners' satisfaction, both genders, with different aspects of the online learning environment. Second, it tried to investigate learners' attitudes towards the challenges and obstacles of the online learning environment. As the final step, the study made clear if there is any difference between male and female EFL learners' views towards online learning context.

The following research questions can be designed based on the research objectives:

RQ<sub>1</sub>. To what extent are the EFL learners satisfied with the online learning environment?

RQ<sub>2</sub>. What is the EFL learners' attitude towards the challenges and obstacles of the online learning environment?

RQ<sub>3</sub>. Is there any difference between male and female EFL learners' views towards the online learning context?

E-Learning brings about special challenges for teachers who are interested in integrating online learning elements into their courses. Kern, Ware, and Warschauer (2014) pointed out that research has turned the attention from focusing on the linguistic and affective characteristics of computer-assisted discussion in single classrooms to long-distance collaboration which is challenging to arrange because it involves diverse learners with different cultural backgrounds, communicative expectations, and rhetorical frameworks. Thus, due to the increasing demand and interest in the use of online learning, it is very important to investigate the gaps and limitations that learners and teachers face when they are exposed to distance learning.

The achievements are useful for EFL learners who may feel a serious deficiency in dealing with distance learning. These deficiencies fall within various categories that may worth to be investigated. Moreover, the teacher will become aware of the pitfalls that may exist in using distance teaching procedures. Online learning classes can provide more opportunities for self-centered learning, enhances self-confidence, and makes learning more enjoyable and appealing for learners. The results of this study may lead to a change in the teachers' and students' views towards online learning. In dealing with a paradigm shift from traditional to modern ways of online learning, new skills are required to function effectively in online programs (Salmon, 2004). Moreover, English language curriculum designers may benefit from this study by minimizing challenges and obstacles of online learning into the curriculum and providing the valuable information to be integrated into the curriculum.

## **2. Method**

The main objective of the present study is to explore EFL learners' satisfaction with the online learning environment along with the challenges and obstacles of it. Therefore, a quantitative method was used as a design of this research to answer the research questions. It should be noted that the present work was designed to assess online learning context as a dependent variable and EFL learners' attitude as the independent one. The quantitative data were gathered through Survey Questionnaires exploring students' level of satisfaction with online learning as well as its challenges and obstacles.

The population of the study was composed of 75 intermediate EFL learners in an Iranian language institute in Ravar. They were selected from four intact classes during the spring term. Their classes were online through Google Meet where the researchers were teaching. Thus, it was more convenient for the researchers to gather the data. The participants

were EFL learners of both genders (33 males and 42 females) with the age range of 16 to 19. The participants received English for 4.5 hours a week. Selecting the participants was based on convenience sampling in which the participants would be chosen based on their availability.

Nelson Placement Test (intermediate Level) was employed in this study to ensure that all the participants were homogenized in terms of their language proficiency. It is known as a standard test and since this test is in multiple-choice format, it is considered to be reliable in scoring. This test comprised 40 items ranging from reading passages, vocabulary, and structure in paper-and-pencil format and the scoring system was out of twenty (each question = a half point). The reliability index of the test was .85 which indicated the test was reliable enough to be used in this study according to the context. It should be noted that the test was administered at the beginning of the term when the learners were supposed to begin the study. Based on the results, the students' scores on the language proficiency test fell within  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of the mean score, and they were all intermediate EFL learners.

In order to collect data, two related questionnaires were employed in the present work. Both of the questionnaires consisted of two parts; the first part explored the information about the students' age and gender. The second part consisted of some items on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The first questionnaire adopted by Arkoful and Abaido (2014) explored students' satisfaction towards online learning environment through 24 items, and the second one developed by Simpson et al. (2019) analyzed the students' attitude on the challenges and obstacles of online learning through 15 related items. The original English questionnaires were translated into Persian to ensure that the participants easily follow the items and then they were translated back into English to ascertain that the translated ones had the same interpretation. It should be noted that the validity and reliability of the questionnaires were checked by the researchers. The content validity of individual items is determined by expert opinion in the area of language methodology. More specifically, the validity of the instruments, the wording of the survey, length of the questionnaires, and the ease of the implementation of the procedures were examined by two experts to avoid any ambiguity and if any final adjustments needed to be done. Also, the suitability of the questionnaires was investigated for the study population by referring to similar studies in similar cases. Moreover, to be sure that the participants would understand the content of each item, their comprehension of the questions was tested and it was understood that the learners had no serious problems understanding the items. Additionally, the reliability of both questionnaires was measured through Cronbach's

alpha test. The reliability of the first questionnaire (analyzing online learning environment) was .83 which was high, and the reliability of the second one (analyzing challenges and obstacles) was .79.

### 3. Results

The data were collected through the questionnaires from 75 EFL students of both genders, 33 (44%) of them were male and 42 (56%) were female. The following table and figure present descriptive statistics of the participants' genders.

Table 1. *Analysis of the Students' Gender*

<b>Gender</b>		
	Frequency	Percentage
Male	33	44%
Female	42	56%
Total	75	100%

Moreover, descriptive statistics of the participants' ages (both genders) indicated that 19 (25.35%) of the students were sixteen, 24 (32%) of them were seventeen, 15 (20%) of the participants were eighteen, and 17 (22.65%) of them were nineteen years old.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Students' Age*

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
16	19	25.35%
17	24	32.00%
18	15	20.00%
19	17	22.65%
<b>Total</b>	75	100%

The first questionnaire explored the students' satisfaction with the online learning environment. It should be noted that the questionnaire assessed different aspects of online learning through 24 related items. All the items were on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". The frequency and percentage of each item were used in order to investigate every question.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Online Learning Questionnaire

<b>N</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>1</b>	I am able to easily access the Internet as needed for my studies.	8 10.65%	10 13.35%	0 0%	22 29.35%	35 46.65%	3.88
<b>2</b>	I feel comfortable communicating in online classes than face to face.	10 13.35%	16 21.35%	2 2.65%	20 26.65%	27 36%	3.50
<b>3</b>	I am willing to actively communicate with my classmates and instructors electronically.	12 16%	15 20%	3 4%	20 26.65%	25 33.35%	3.41
<b>4</b>	I feel that my online experience will be beneficial to my studies.	16 21.35%	15 20%	3 4%	22 29.35%	19 25.35%	3.20
<b>5</b>	I am more comfortable with written communication in the online classes than face-to-face.	13 17.35%	18 24%	0 0%	20 26.65%	24 32%	3.11
<b>6</b>	I believe looking back on what I have learned in an online course will help me to remember it better.	18 24%	15 20%	4 5.35%	20 26.65%	18 24%	3.06
<b>7</b>	In my online studies, I am self-disciplined and find it easy to set aside reading and homework time than face to face.	12 16%	16 21.35%	5 6.65%	20 26.65%	22 29.35%	3.32
<b>8</b>	I am able to manage my study time effectively and easily complete assignments on time.	6 8%	14 18.65%	4 5.35%	26 34.65%	25 33.35%	3.66

<b>9</b>	It is more enjoyable working independently in online classes than face to face.	17 22.70%	10 13.35%	5 6.65%	25 22.65%	26 34.65%	3.76
<b>10</b>	In online classes, I enjoy working with other students in groups than face to face.	12 16%	12 16%	2 2.65%	21 28%	28 37.35%	3.54
<b>11</b>	I like a lot of interaction with my instructors and/or teaching assistants.	13 17.35%	12 16%	5 6.65%	27 36%	18 24%	3.33
<b>12</b>	I feel more comfortable composing text on a computer in an online learning environment than face to face.	11 14.65%	14 18.65%	5 6.65%	23 30.65%	22 29.35%	3.41
<b>13</b>	I can ask my teacher and receive a response during Internet activities outside of class.	10 13.35%	14 18.65%	0 0%	26 34.65%	25 33.35%	3.56
<b>14</b>	I feel that face-to-face contact with my instructor is necessary to learn.	16 21.30%	13 17.35%	7 9.35%	20 26.65%	19 25.35%	2.90
<b>15</b>	I am motivated by the material in an Internet activity outside of class.	10 13.35%	12 16%	6 8%	22 29.35%	25 33.35%	3.53
<b>16</b>	I can discuss with other students during Internet activities outside of class.	11 14.65%	9 12%	0 0%	28 37.35%	22 29.35%	3.34
<b>17</b>	I can work in a group during Internet activities outside of class.	15 20%	13 17.35%	0 0%	22 29.35%	25 33.30%	3.58
<b>18</b>	In online classes, I can collaborate better with other	11 14.65%	14 18.65%	1 1.35%	25 33.35%	24 32%	3.49

	students than face to face.						
<b>19</b>	Learning is the same in class and at home on the Internet.	9 12%	12 16%	7 9.35%	24 32%	23 30.65%	3.53
<b>20</b>	I can practice English grammar/vocabulary during Internet activities outside of class.	10 13.35%	14 18.65%	2 2.65%	28 37.35%	21 28%	3.48
<b>21</b>	I believe that learning on the Internet outside of class is more motivating than a regular and face to face course.	10 13.35%	7 9.35%	5 6.65%	25 33.30%	28 37.33%	3.52
<b>22</b>	I believe a complete course can be given by the Internet without difficulty.	10 13.35%	10 13.35%	0 0%	30 40%	25 33.30%	3.66
<b>23</b>	I could pass a course on the Internet with less teacher assistance.	16 21.35%	13 17.30%	6 8%	22 29.35%	18 24%	3.17
<b>24</b>	I learn better through online learning than face-to-face learning.	9 12%	8 10.70%	3 4%	26 34.65%	29 38.65%	3.77

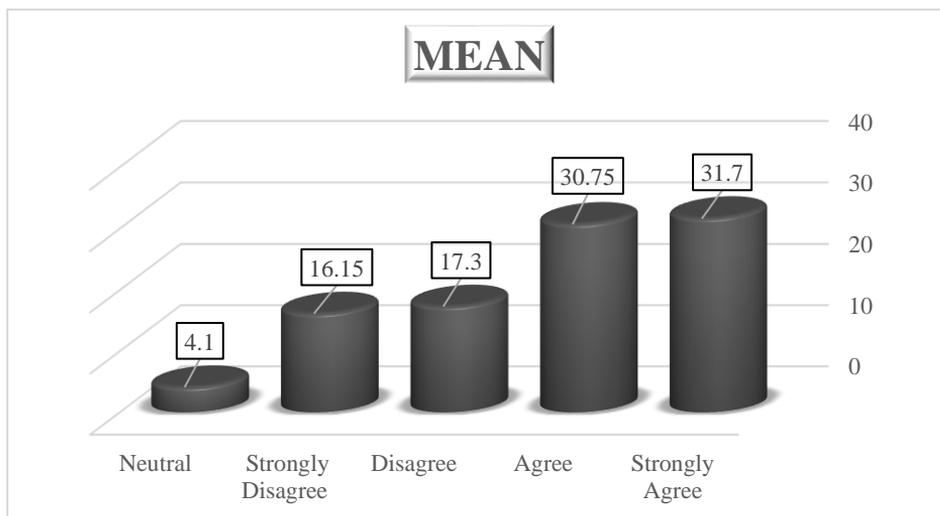
\* SD= Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; N=neutral; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree

Data analysis of the first item of the above questionnaire displayed that a high percentage of the participants (76%) were able to easily access the Internet as needed for their studies, but 14% were not able to access it easily. The second item revealed that more than half of the participants (62.65%) felt comfortable communicating in online classes compared to face-to-face classes. However, 34.7% of them disagreed and 2.65% had neutral opinions. Analysis of the third item showed exactly 60% of the students were willing to actively communicate with their classmates and instructors electronically, 24% were unwilling and 4% had neutral ideas on the mentioned item. Item four investigated that more than half of the

students (54.7%) felt their online experience would be beneficial to their studies, but 41.35% disagreed and 4% showed their neutral idea on this statement. The analysis of item five indicated that more than half of the students (58.65%) were more comfortable with written communications in the online class than face to face classes, but 41.35% were not comfortable with written forms. Moreover, 50.65% of the participants believed that looking back on what they had learned in the online course would help them to remember it better. Analysis of the next item indicated that 56% of the respondents agreed that in online studies, they were self-disciplined and find it easy to set aside reading and homework time than face to face. Also, 62.65% of them stated that they were able to manage their study time effectively and easily complete assignments on time. Most of the participants (68%) believed that it is more enjoyable working independently in online classes than face to face, and 65.35% of the EFL students stated that they enjoyed working with other students in groups than face to face. Data analysis of the next item revealed that exactly 60% of the EFL learners liked a lot of interaction with their instructors and/or teaching assistants and once again, 60% felt more comfortable in composing text on a computer in an online learning environment than face to face. Then, 68% of the students declared that they could ask their questions and receive a response during Internet activities outside of class. Analysis of the next item showed that 52% of the students felt that face-to-face contact with their instructor is necessary to learn, and 62.7% of them were motivated by the material in an Internet activity outside of class. Based on the analysis of items sixteen and seventeen, 67% of the participants said that they could discuss with other students during Internet activities outside of class, and 62.65% of them could work in a group during Internet activities outside of class. As it can be seen from the above table, 65.35% of the students could collaborate better with other students than face to face, and 62.35% of them believed that learning is the same in class and at home on the Internet. Moreover, 65.35% of the students could practice English grammar/vocabulary during Internet activities outside of class, and a high percentage (70.63%) believed that learning on the Internet outside of class is more motivating than a regular and face to face course. Besides, most of the students (70.63%) believed that a complete course can be given by the Internet without difficulty, and more than half of them (53.35%) mentioned that they could pass a course on the Internet with less teacher assistance. Finally, a great percentage of the participants agreed that they learned better through online learning than face-to-face learning.

The following figure analyzed the mean scores of each item of the questionnaire. Based on careful analysis, "Strongly Agree" received the

first rank with the highest mean score (31.70). After that, "Agree" was placed in the second rank with the mean score of 30.75, and "Disagree" put the third rank with the mean of 17.30. Then, "Strongly Disagree" received the fourth rank with the mean score of 16.15 followed by "Neutral" as the last rank in the table with the lowest mean score (4.10). Accordingly, it can be stated that most of the participants indicated their agreement on the items of the first questionnaire.



**Figure 1. Mean Score of the Five Scales of Questionnaire**

The second questionnaire explored the students' attitudes towards the challenges and obstacles of the online learning environment. The questionnaire assessed the challenges and problems through 15 related items.

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire of Online Learning Challenges**

N	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean
1	I received low or no participation from my classmates.	21 28%	29 38.65%	3 4%	12 16%	10 13.35%	2.48
2	I have lack of time to participate in online classes.	32 42.65%	30 40%	0 0%	5 6.65%	8 10.70%	2.02

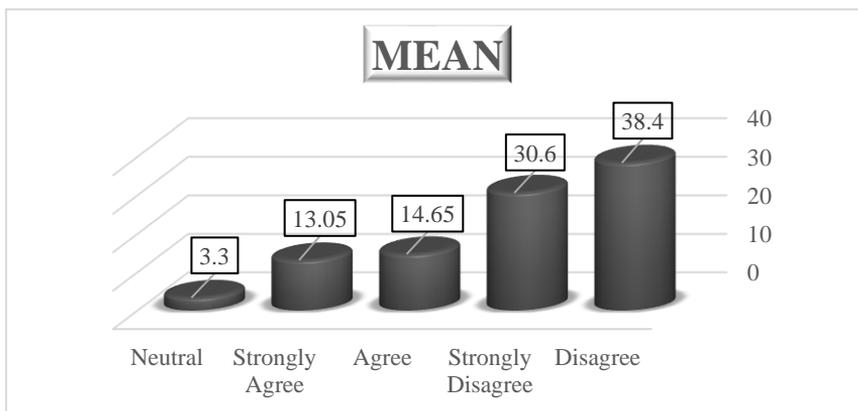
<b>3</b>	I received no feedback from the instructor.	30 40%	28 37.35%	2 2.65%	10 13.35%	5 6.65%	2.09
<b>4</b>	I received no feedback from the peers.	22 29.35%	28 37.30%	3 4%	12 16%	10 13.35%	2.46
<b>5</b>	The materials cannot be shared completely.	27 36%	33 44%	0 0%	8 10.65%	7 9.35%	2.24
<b>6</b>	I often feel frustrated during online courses.	24 32%	27 36%	5 6.65	10 13.35%	9 12%	2.37
<b>7</b>	I am not satisfied with the level of contact I had with my peers.	25 33.35%	24 32%	3 4%	11 14.65%	12 16%	2.61
<b>8</b>	I am not able to interact with my classmates as part of my online learning when needed.	28 37.35%	23 30.65%	0 0%	11 14.65%	13 17.35%	2.44
<b>9</b>	I cannot seek help from the instructor when required.	26 34.65%	31 41.35%	0 0%	10 13.35%	8 10.65%	2.24
<b>10</b>	I have low motivation to study in online classes.	20 26.70%	27 36%	5 6.65%	12 16%	11 14.65%	2.56
<b>11</b>	There is a lack of interaction with my teacher.	25 33.35%	23 30.65%	4 5.35%	13 17.30%	10 13.35%	2.46
<b>12</b>	I am not interested to take online classes.	21 28%	25 33.35%	5 6.65%	14 18.65%	10 13.35%	2.56
<b>13</b>	It is hard to stick to the study schedule of online classes.	18 24%	25 33.35%	3 4%	17 22.65%	12 16%	2.73
<b>14</b>	I cannot understand content	24 32%	20 26.70%	2 2.65%	12 16%	17 22.65%	2.70

	delivered in online classes.						
<b>15</b>	Online classes are not comfortable as offline classes.	25 33.35 %	31 41.35%	4 5.35%	8 10.65%	7 9.30%	2.21

\* SD= Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; N=neutral; A= Agree; SA= Strongly Agree

Data analysis of the first item of the second questionnaire revealed that most of the students (66.65%) disagreed on this item. They did not receive low or no participation from their classmates. Then, a high percentage of the participants (82.65%) did not have a lack of time to participate in online classes and 77.35% did not receive feedback from the instructor. Also, 66.75% of the participants did not receive feedback from the peers. Then, the analysis of the following items indicated that a great percentage of the respondents (80%) stated that the materials were shared completely, and 68% of them did not feel frustrated during online courses. Also, 65.35% of the participants were satisfied with the level of contact they had with their peers, and 68% of them were able to interact with their classmates as part of my online learning when needed. According to data from the above table, a high percentage of the EFL learners (76%) could seek help from the instructor when required, and 62.70% of them did not have low motivation for study in online classes. Data analysis of items 11 and 12 indicated that 64% of the students stated there is no lack of interaction with their teacher, and 61.35% of them were interested to take online classes. After that, more than half of the EFL learners (57.35%) agreed that it was not hard to stick to the study schedule of online classes, and 58.70% of them agreed that they could understand content delivered in online classes. Finally, a high percentage of the participants (74.70%) agreed that online classes were not comfortable as offline classes.

Additionally, the following figure analyzed the mean scores of each item of the second questionnaire. Based on careful analysis, "Disagree" was the first rank with the highest mean score (38.40). After that, "Strongly Disagree" was placed in the second rank with the mean score of 30.60, and "Agree" was the third rank with the mean of 14.65. Then, "Strongly Agree" got the fourth rank with the mean score of 13.05 followed by "Neutral" as the last rank in the table with the lowest mean score (3.30). Accordingly, it can be stated that most of the participants indicated their disagreement with the items of the first questionnaire.



**Figure 2. Mean Score of the Five Scales of Questionnaire**

Before addressing the third research question, Independent Samples T-test was used for examining the possible differences between the males' and females' attitudes towards the online learning environment. It is worthy to mention that the unequal number of male and female students (more females than the males) are considered in the mentioned test. According to the results of the test, it is clear that the significance level (Sig) is less than 0.05; it means that there is no difference between the variables (male and female attitudes). Therefore, considering the significance level of this test (P-value = 0.04) which is less than 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), it can be stated with more than 99% of certainty, there is no difference between the two groups of male and female students' attitudes towards online learning environments.

**Table 5. Independent Samples T-test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Compare	Equal variances assumed	5.809	0.04	1.55	4	.165	157.00	201.92	-74.642	379.642
	Equal variances not assumed			1.55	4	.174	157.00	201.92	-97.764	415.764

#### **4. Discussion**

Investigating the Iranian EFL students' views on online learning classes was the main objective of this study. The data was gathered from the survey and analyzed quantitatively. According to the statistical achieved results in the previous sections, three research questions are answered individually and completely.

##### ***4.1. To what extent are the EFL learners satisfied with the online learning environment?***

To evaluate the above research question, a 24-item questionnaire was distributed among the participants, and the data were analyzed descriptively. Findings of the survey indicated that a high percentage of the participants (70% and more) were able to easily access the Internet as needed for their studies. They believed that learning on the Internet is more motivating than a regular and face-to-face course, and a complete course can be given by the Internet without difficulty. Then, most of the students (60% and more) felt comfortable communicating in online classes, and they were willing to actively communicate with their classmates and instructors. Besides, they were able to manage their study time effectively and they enjoyed working independently and also working with other students in groups. Also, they liked a lot of interaction with their instructors, they could ask their questions and receive a response during online activities and felt more comfortable in composing text on a computer than face-to-face classes. They were motivated by the online materials and they could discuss and collaborate with other students, work in a group and practice English grammar/vocabulary during online activities. They believed that learning is the same in class and at home on the Internet. In addition, more than half of the students (more than 50%) felt their online experience would be beneficial and believed they learned better through online learning than face-to-face learning. They were more self-disciplined in online classes than face-to-face classes, and could pass a course on the Internet with less teacher's assistance. Based on the careful analysis, most of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the items of the first questionnaire as they showed their satisfactions and positive attitudes towards the online learning environments.

##### ***4.2. What is the EFL learners' attitude towards the challenges and obstacles of the online learning environment?***

Descriptive data analysis of the second questionnaire indicated that a great percentage of the participants (more than 80%) received high participation from their classmates. Also, they had enough time to

participate in online classes and they stated that the materials were shared completely. Moreover, a high percentage of them (more than 70%) received feedback from the instructor and could seek help from the instructor when required, and they agreed online classes were comfortable as offline classes are. Additionally, more than half of the EFL learners (more than 50%) agreed that it was not hard to stick to the study schedule of online classes, and they agreed that they could understand content delivered in online classes. According to the careful analysis, most of the EFL learners showed their disagreement on the items of the second questionnaire which covered the challenges and obstacles of the online learning environment. Therefore, it can be stated that most of the students showed a negative attitude towards the challenges and obstacles of online learning environments.

#### ***4.3. Is there any difference between male and female EFL learners' views towards online learning context?***

The present work addressed another question which examined the possible difference between male and female EFL learners' views towards online learning context. To do this, an Independent Samples t-test was used for finding the possible difference between the males' and females' attitudes. According to the results of the test, it is clear that the significance level (Sig) is less than 0.05, which means that there is no difference between the variables (Male and Female attitudes). Therefore, considering the significance level of this test (P-value = 0.04) which is less than 0.05, it can be stated with more than 99% of certainty, there is no difference between the two groups of male and female students' attitudes. It is worthy to note that the findings of this work are in accordance with a more recent study by Arshad Khan et al., (2021) who examined the students' perception and challenges towards online classes during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Their findings of the study revealed that students have positive perceptions towards online classes during the pandemic to maintain their academic growth. Nonetheless, they experienced several challenges in online classes. The other related work was done by Yildiz (2020), and the students reported positively the effectiveness of online learning during the pandemic. The findings of the study displayed that using educational technology in teaching and learning was appropriate. Moreover, a quantitative study by Alturise (2020) revealed the learners' and teachers' satisfaction in the online learning model. The study concluded that the e-learning mode is an advancement in education, but significant works are needed to improve online learning applications. Furthermore, the results of this study are in line with a study by Dhawan (2019) and an overall satisfaction was achieved by the course.

Also, the results are in agreement with an observation (Kaid & Bin-Hady 2019), which supported the impact of using social media applications in learning and recommended activation of these applications in English language learning.

On the contrary, the findings of this study have not supported the results of a recent study by Muthuprasad et al. (2021) who explored the university students' perception of online education during this pandemic. The results indicated that online learning was less effective when compared with face-to-face classes. It has also highlighted the issue of the digital divide and inequalities in obtaining internet connection that creates a problem for several students. Also, the results are inconsistent with Shetty (2020) who found that students faced many challenges such as lack of socialization, technological-related issues, and eye-related problems, etc. They lost their interest in online classes due to internet connectivity issues when the classes went on; the majority of students favored a combined approach of learning post-COVID-19 outbreak. In the same year, another study was done by Mahyoob (2020) on challenges of e-Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and some problems as technical, academic, and communication were found. Also, most EFL learners were not satisfied with continuing online learning, as they could not fulfill the expected progress in language learning performance. Additionally, Joshi (2019) conducted a study to understand the barriers faced by university teachers in online teaching and assessment at home environments. They categorized some barriers including lack of basic facilities, family interruption during teaching, institutions support barriers, absence of training, lack of clarity and direction, insufficient budget for purchasing advanced technologies, low motivation for teaching, and lack of technological knowledge, etc.

## **5. Conclusion**

Recently, the development of educational technology has allowed online learning to be easily adopted in educational contexts (Hamdan et al., 2013). This learning environment can be characterized as a student-centered one and the participants are expected to come to class having already gained the knowledge necessary to actively engage with their instructors and peers. Regarding the importance and effectiveness of online learning, the need for education updating was required (Wolfinger, 2016). As mentioned in the previous sections, this research focused on EFL learners' views towards online learning environment along with challenges and obstacles during the current global pandemic. The students' views were explored through the related questionnaires and most of the students indicated their positive attitudes towards online learnings.

On the whole, the participants' overall satisfaction with online learning environments compared to face-to-face learnings was found by this study. Additionally, the students' negative attitudes towards the challenges and obstacles of online learning environments were observed. It is important to note that there are some problems and challenges in such a context, but students' answers indicated their disagreement with the items related to challenges and obstacles of online learning. Finally, the results showed no difference between males' and females' attitudes towards online learning environments. It should be considered that the challenges to access online learning are decreasing, because both students and teachers have been experienced the excellent opportunity of knowing and interacting with educational technology tools such as computer-based learning, mobile-based learning, web-based learning, etc. (Pellegrini, Mirella, Vladimir Uskov, & Casalino, 2020; Byun, Sooyeon, & Slavin, 2020). In Prensky's (2001) view, nowadays language students are completely different from their predecessors because they are native speakers of the technological language and their interaction with the virtual and digital world is more. The interactions of language learners with different sorts of technology for various goals enabled them to be active recipients of e-learning (Vai, Marjorie & Sosulski, 2015; Ko & Rossen, 2017; Mohalikand & Sahoo, 2020). Regarding the results which focused on the general satisfaction of the participants with online English classes during the COVID-19, some factors are necessary to be considered. Offering online courses in most language institutions should be supported and facilitated as they provided an excellent opportunity for language learners and institutes to switch to online learning after the outbreak of this pandemic. However, at the beginning of online courses, most of the students suffer from the lack of experience and confidence to use a new medium. After a while, most could overcome the technical issues related to online learning platforms. Totally, some online learning challenges can be existed in such context, so necessary steps should be taken in order to facilitate the online education process and to overcome the existing challenges and obstacles. E-learning brings about special challenges for teachers who are interested in integrating e-learning elements into their courses. Kern, Ware, and Warschauer (2014) noted that research has turned the attention from focusing on the affective features of computer-assisted discussion in single classrooms to long-distance cooperation that is challenging to arrange. It involves students with various cultural backgrounds, communicative expectations, rhetorical frameworks, etc. Thus, due to the increasing demand and interest in the use of online learning, it is very important to investigate the gaps and limitations that learners and teachers face when they are exposed to distance learning. The achievements of this

study are useful for the EFL learners who may feel serious deficiencies in dealing with distance learning. These deficiencies fall within various categories that may worth to be investigated. Moreover, teachers will become aware of the pitfalls that may exit in using distance teaching procedures. At the end, the government must take certain remedial measures to overcome the challenges in online classes and reduce the digital divide so that no students will be left out.

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