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Research Article

Iranian EFL Learners' Online Learning Satisfaction amid Covid-19 Pandemic: Examining Different Proficiency Levels

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ABSTRACT

This study was an effort towards comparing Iranian EFL learners' online learning satisfaction at three levels of proficiency during the Covid-19 pandemic. The participants were 268 Iranian EFL learners studying at different institutes in Shiraz-Iran, within the age range of 18 to 35. The participants' English proficiency was determined by the Quick Oxford Placement Test which divided them into three groups of beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners. Afterward, the participants were administered a questionnaire assessing their overall satisfaction with online education. The researchers used one-way ANOVA to investigate any significant differences between the three proficiency levels in terms of overall online learning satisfaction. Besides, as the questionnaire consisted of five dimensions, the researchers found it crucial to employ five other one-way ANOVAs to check any significant differences in terms of the five dimensions. The findings revealed a significant difference between the three proficiency levels where advanced level learners, in comparison to beginners, showed more satisfaction with online learning and intermediate level learners were more satisfied with online learning as well. The only group which showed more reluctance toward online learning was the beginner-level learners. More details are available in the text.

Introduction

The goal of education is to cause a person to be impeccable (Radha, Mahalakshmi, Kumar, & Saravanakumar, 2020). Education provides the pathway to reach one's destiny. It also helps in inculcating social responsibilities. The main core of education is to learn, and learning is a process of acquiring knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught. Any freak accident that happens in the world will always leave an impact on education, so the epidemic of Covid-19 has its footprints on education (Radha, Mahalakshmi, Kumar, & Saravanakumar, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has forcefully changed the mode of teaching and learning from traditional or face-to-face learning to online or distance learning all over the world, which is a new experience for many teachers and students. The spread of the Novel Corona Virus pandemic (Covid-19) has caused fear, anxiety, and several

concerns among people around the world. This pandemic has disrupted every aspect of human life including education throughout the world. The pace of its spread made educational institution closure one of the best preventive measures against it (Paudel, 2021).

The contagious nature of this virus caused educational systems around the world to change the mode of instructing the materials to a more modern type. So, it paved the way for web-based learning or online learning. Online learning is defined as a delivering method of information associated with education using the Internet instead of traditional and physical classrooms or lecture halls (LearnX, 2020).

E-learning provides rapid growth and proved to be the best in all sectors, especially in education during this lockdown (Radha et. al, 2020). Dawson, Cavanaugh, and Ritzhaupt (2008) and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2014) mentioned that using technology can cause positive changes by making the learning atmosphere the center of learners' interest and attention. They also emphasized the significant role of using computer technology which causes language class to be an active place filled with meaningful tasks leading learners to be responsible for their learning. Besides benefits, e-learning has brought some challenges to education. Therefore, considering the online learning challenges which EFL learners have faced during covid-19 pandemic, this study was carried out to explore students' online learning satisfaction considering their different proficiency levels. To further explore the issue, the present study aimed to seek an answer to the following research question:

RQ. Are there any significant differences in online learning satisfaction of Iranian EFL learners at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of language proficiency?

Literature Review

Online Learning

Generally speaking, the literature on the satisfaction of EFL learners in online learning provides different attitudes. Some learners tend to feel comfortable with online learning, but some others do not. Online education is a term used most frequently to describe technology-based learning in all of its types. Moreover, other terms including "distance learning", "electronic learning" and "online learning" are also used in some contexts. Yekefallah et al. (2020) defined e-learning as: "e" as exciting, energetic, eager, emotional, extended, and educational, quoting Bernard Luskin. He further defined e-learning as learning through the Internet capability. Similarly, Benson and Conrad (2002) described online learning as follows: By the use of some technology, learners can have access to learning experiences. In addition, according to Hiltz and Turoff (2005) and Conrad (2002), online learning is considered a new form or version of distance education.

Similarly, Keegan (1996) considered distance education as an umbrella term for correspondence education, e-learning, online learning, web-based and virtual learning. Siegel, Ellis, and Lewis (2004) stated that instruction in e-learning not only takes place on websites, the Internet, intranet, and CD-ROM, but also on audio, video, and TV. Tavangarian, Leypold, Nölting, Röser, and Voigt (2004) believed that as in e-learning learners' experiences were in transformation, thus it could not be considered procedural.

As Allen, Bourhis, Burrell, and Marbry (2002) stated, research on online education affirmed its positive influences on learners due to the flexibility and convenience offered by online classes. Lee (2010) concludes that social learning and information technologies that allow communication between instructors and students via ordinary interaction help facilitate online education. According to Fauziana (2020), learners can review their lessons by revisiting and re-checking the recordings made by the instructor, to gain information from books or using the Internet to strengthen their knowledge.

According to Lee and Lee (2019), and Nugroho and Mutiaraningrum, (2020), some traditional and face-to-face classrooms are changing their way to online classes. As mentioned by Arkorful and Abaidoo (2014), e-learning or online learning is to implement digital tools for both learning and teaching. Crawford-Ferre and Wiest (2012), and Gabriel and Kaufield (2008) believed that it takes more time to teach online courses than traditional courses. Sun and Chen (2016) found that creating a sense

of community is one of the vital challenges in online learning.

Hasifah (2020) argued that interactive online learning helps students uncover new information to find out more about digital libraries and websites. She also believed that online learning is essential as it makes learners able to have more effective self-learning. Students are free to set the time they spend, the material they learn, and the way of their learning. They also have the chance to check and re-check the challenging topics to have a full understanding.

In addition, online learning lets students be comfortable studying in a "safe" environment, without having the feeling of embarrassment about asking questions. Irfan and Iman (2020) contend that online learning is neither effective nor appropriate. Considering different factors such as unsuitable Internet facilities, teachers' inability to implement online learning appropriately, and parents' lack of cooperation in this process. As Aragon (2003) pointed out, a good sense of comfort and connection among learners in online learning environments can be created by having a social presence.

According to Helgesen and Nesset (2007), McGorry (2003), and Rovai (2003), positive views of students on online education originate from certain online education factors such as quality, flexibility, sensitivity, communication, and technical support services. According to Kaur, Dwivedi, Arora, and Gandhi (2020), the goal of holding online classes (e-learning) is not only limited to fulfilling the training course sessions, but to preserving communication with the learners, increasing their level of self-esteem, and promoting their ability confidence amid Covid-19 pandemic.

As Singh and Hurley (2017) suggest, the conduct of high integrity standards should be taken into consideration in online education, according to what Diekhoff et al. (1996), Haines et al. (1986), Stiles et al. (2018), and Vandehey et al. (2007) believed, it had long been a challenge in chalk and board classrooms, as proved by decade-long studies. Tanhan (2020) also considered online education as being both the most crucial facilitator for some students and also the most important barrier for others during the Covid-19 process. In contrast, Awal et al. (2020) found that online learning is effective but not efficient enough. They further suppose online learning to be effective as a response to the urgency of the pandemic; however, learning outcomes cannot be met, due to its requirements of significant costs to purchase suitable Internet packages.

Brindley, Blaschke, and Walti (2009) delineated more techniques in great detail, containing encouraging learner readiness for group work; presenting a framework for developing skills; creating logical stability between structure and learner autonomy, improving a sense of community among learners; supervising group activities; making group tasks relevant for learners; choosing tasks that can be best fitted for being performed by a group, and providing adequate time for collaborative learning activities.

According to Yuan and Kim (2014), online learners take advantage of online learning communities in various ways: (1) due to their collaboration and interaction with each other, they can share knowledge and accomplish common goals, which helps reduce the rating of students' dropouts; (2) learner-instructor and learner-learner can enhance learners' performances and their satisfaction of the course; and (3) in this way, learners can in the support of their peers and simultaneously.

Online Learning Satisfaction

Wu, Tennyson, and Hsia (2010) believed that learner satisfaction refers to expectations, attitudes, and perceptions of learners toward a particular mode of learning. Satisfaction has been defined as the association between learners' expectations and actual gains (Rashidi & Moghadam, 2014). Hong, Lai, and Holton (2003) stated that students' satisfaction and appreciation of online education are depicted clearly in some studies in the literature. According to Mitchell and Chen (2005), the literature supports a strong level of association between computer experience and a greater level of satisfaction in online learning.

Active involvement of the learners in the life of the college, especially academically, helps them gain greater knowledge acquisition and skill development. As Juillerat (1995) stated, the more students participate actively, the higher satisfaction rates they will gain in the process of

online learning in comparison to less involved students.

According to Pourtavakoli, Alinejad, and Daneshmand (2021), despite the great potential of e-learning, students show reluctance toward attending school and decide to drop out of school; therefore, it is vital to get to know some affecting variables causing this reluctance. Among these variables, satisfaction is a key element and one crucial indicator of education quality. As Pourtavakoli et al. (2021) further proposed, the role of content has gained enormous attention itself and it is much more important to consider it more influential in the e-learning curriculum than in the conventional education curriculum. As Pitcher et al. (2010) pointed out, several elements are influencing the satisfaction level of students in the e-learning process such as structure; flexibility; experiences and support of the teacher; motivation; and communication.

Regarding some important factors related to learners, Sun et al. (2008) stated that there are some important factors such as the learners' attitude toward the computer, the learners' anxiety about the computer, and the learners' self-efficacy. Regarding the instructor, he further mentioned some other important factors such as their attitude towards e-learning and the amount of response to learners about the instructional materials, flexibility, and quality of the contents, the technology domain, technology quality, and Internet; regarding design, usefulness, and ease of use; and finally regarding the learning environment, diversity and the extent of learners' communication with others; were considered as crucial factors in learners' satisfaction.

Empirical Studies

Paechter and Maier (2010) made a comparison between online learning and face-to-face learning whose results showed that students had a positive perception about online learning. A study conducted by Hindes (1999) showed that web-based instruction is considered an important factor in providing students with a more positive learning environment. According to Rosenberg (2001), E-learning is characterized as the Internet technology use to submit a wide range of solutions that can improve learning knowledge and performance.

Ahmed (2011) aimed to investigate EFL students' learning styles and satisfaction with web-based materials. To this end, 51 EFL college students (24 males and 27 females) who were assigned to three lab classes were selected. The participants were exposed to various web-based materials (e.g., listening, reading, writing, and grammar). An adapted form of Reid's (1998) Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) was used to identify participants' learning styles after exposure to web-based instruction. Also, a 5-point Likert scale type in which the items were scored from 1 to 5, that is strongly agree was scored as 1, and strongly disagree was scored as 5 was administered to examine students' satisfaction with web-based learning. Statistical analyses revealed that kinesthetic, tactile, and visual were the major styles the participants favored when working with online activities. Findings also showed highly positive perceptions toward web-based learning due to an array of benefits (e.g., usefulness, enjoyment, accessibility, convenience, and richness of resources). Finally, whereas students' gender had a significant effect on students' learning style preferences, it had no bearing on their satisfaction with web-based materials.

Gyamfi and Sukseemuang (2018) investigated EFL learners' satisfaction with the asynchronous online learning program Tell Me More (TMM). 340 EFL learners' satisfaction with the TMM program was surveyed. In addition, a semi-structured focus group interview was conducted with 10 of the participants to gain in-depth insight into their satisfaction. The student's proficiency level was measured based on a placement test incorporated into the program. An achievement test was also employed to measure their level of progress in the middle and at the end of the semester respectively. The TMM program was used for specific hours based on students' levels of proficiency in the placement test. The beginners were supposed to use the program for 50 hours, the intermediate group between 30 to 40 hours, and the advanced group spent 20 hours. The result depicted that the learners were highly satisfied with the vocabulary, reading, and listening aspects of the program. It further indicated learners' satisfaction to use TMM for self-study, meaningful content, and language learning potential.

Ali and Ahmad (2011) conducted a study to investigate the key factors for determining student satisfaction in distance learning courses. 245 students were selected from one of the open universities in Pakistan. The purpose of this study was to address the most recent problem related to distance learning of Allama Iqbal University students in Pakistan. The problem was that most of the people in Pakistan perceived distance learning as poorer quality. To find out its correctness, researchers decided to check students' perceptions of distance learning. By using correlation, regression, and descriptive analysis, the results showed that just like traditional education, in online education there is enough interaction between students themselves and also between students and the instructor. Instructors were motivated and knowledgeable and the courses were updated and well-designed enough to meet students' needs.

Johnson, Aragon, Shaik, and Palma-Rivas (2000) made a comparative research study about learner satisfaction and learning outcomes in online and face-to-face learning environments. To this end, 19 students with a mean age of 36.76 years were enrolled online and 19 students with a mean age of 33.08 years were enrolled on campus. They completed the university's course evaluation questionnaire and the Course Interaction, Structure, and Support Questionnaire near the end of the semester. The results showed that those students who were enrolled on-campus has a more positive attitude about the teacher quality of the course. The conclusion showed that there was no significant difference in the effectiveness of online learning with the traditional learning course learning for learners.

Zamberg, Schiffer, and Stoermann-Chopard (2021) conducted research on novice and advanced learners' satisfaction and Perceptions of an e-learning renal semiology module during the Covid-19 pandemic. To this end, their study aimed to prospectively assess advanced and novice medical students' perceptions of and satisfaction with an e-learning activity teaching renal semiology. All second-year medical students (novice learners) and 17 fourth- to sixth-year students (advanced learners) from the medical faculty of the University of Geneva, Switzerland, were invited to participate in a non-compulsory, validated web-based survey. The survey included questions with 10-point Likert scale answers with one qualitative open-ended question using a mixed method analysis. 88 (63%) of the novice learners and all the advanced students responded to the survey. Results of the study depicted that advanced learners reported significantly higher satisfaction with the e-learning activity and novice students showed moderate satisfaction with online learning.

Regarding the literature on online learning, in general, and online language learning satisfaction, in particular, to the researchers' best knowledge, few studies have ever considered the language proficiency level of the students into account. To this end, this study aimed at comparing Iranian EFL learners' online learning satisfaction during the Covid-19 pandemic at three proficiency levels.

Method

Participants

Participants of the present study were 268 Iranian EFL learners who were selected from among 320 learners based on their score distributions on a Quick Oxford Placement Test. The participants were studying at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels at different language institutes in Shiraz, Iran, and their ages ranged from 10 to 35. They were both female and male learners. They had the same teacher and the same method of teaching. From among the 268 participants, eighty-four were beginners, ninety-three were intermediate, and ninety-one were advanced learners of English. The sampling procedure used in this study was the non-probability sampling of convenience type.

Instruments

Quick Oxford Placement Test (QOPT)

To test the proficiency level of the participants at the beginning of the present study, a sample of the Quick Oxford Placement Test (QOPT), developed by Oxford University Press, was administered. The test consisted of two parts. Part 1 was taken by all candidates. Part 2 was for higher-ability students only. All students had to complete Part One. Part Two had to be completed only by those students who had scored more than a predetermined score in Part One.

The first part of the placement test included 40 questions and the second part consisted of 20 questions. Only those whose scores fell between 30-39 were allowed to take the second part. Based on the criteria set by the developers, those whose scores fell between 0 to 15 were considered beginners, between 16 to 23 were elementary, between 24 to 30 were lower intermediate, between 31 to 40 were intermediate, and 40 were advanced.

Online Learning Satisfaction Questionnaire

To determine the satisfaction of the participants with online education, an inventory developed by Stefanovic, Drapsin, Nikolic, and Scepanovic (2011) was employed. It included five categories with 39 items. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 as strongly agree to 5 as strongly disagree was used for the measurement and all the respondents were asked to mark only one option. The validity of the instrument had been reported by the developers and the internal consistency for each category had been estimated separately. For the present study, the reliability of the instrument was reestablished through Cronbach's alpha, and a coefficient of .85 was estimated. The validity of the instrument was also reestablished through expert checks. The questionnaire items were translated into Persian so that the participants would not have difficulty understanding the items. The validity of the translated version was established via expert check.

Data collection procedure

As specified before, to collect the necessary data, first, the process of homogenization was done through QOPT, and the participants were assigned to three proficiency groups, i.e. beginner, intermediate, and advanced. In other words, from among the 320 participants and for each proficiency level, those who scored one Standard Deviation below and above the mean were considered appropriate to take part in the study, and the rest were excluded from the study. As a result, 268 participants were recognized as appropriate. Before the completion of the questionnaire, the researcher provided the participants with some information on the objectives of the research, and any ambiguities were resolved on how to complete the questionnaire, and the participants' informed consent was taken.

The participants of this study were instructed by the same teacher to control for the instructor effect as an extraneous variable. Afterward, the researcher administered the satisfaction questionnaire in a separate online session. To answer the research question, due to the pandemic of Covid-19, there was no possibility to distribute the questionnaires face-to-face in the institutes. The researcher conducted the research through the WhatsApp application which is a popular social platform and accessible to all participants. All the participants were asked to fill out and send the questionnaires in private chats so that the data would remain confidential. From among the 320 learners, 268 filled in the questionnaire items, and were considered as the real participants of the study. The data obtained from the questionnaire and the test was fed into SPSS (Version 21) for descriptive and inferential analysis to answer the research question.

Results

The following tables indicate descriptive statistics regarding the participants' scores. Table 4.1 represents descriptive statistics regarding the participants' total scores on the online learning satisfaction questionnaire.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics regarding the participants 'total scores on the online learning satisfaction questionnaire

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
BEGINNER	84	124.30	9.331	1.796
INTERMEDIATE	93	98.82	19.720	3.727
ADVANCED	91	104.52	27.698	4.975
Total	268	108.87	23.167	2.498

Table 1 shows the number of participants and the means and standard deviation of each separately.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics considering the participants' scores on different scale dimensions

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TOTAL.SUM.INSTRUCTORDIMENSION	BEGINNER	84	13.74	2.086
	INTERMEDIATE	93	11.04	3.049
	ADVANCED	91	12.00	3.759
	Total	268	12.23	3.238
TOTAL.SUM.COURSE DIMENSION	BEGINNER	84	34.56	5.243
	INTERMEDIATE	93	26.21	9.223
	ADVANCED	91	28.52	7.949
	Total	268	29.66	8.351
TOTAL.SUM.TECHNOLOGY	BEGINNER	84	27.26	1.347
	INTERMEDIATE	93	24.46	4.607
	ADVANCED	91	22.61	6.541
	Total	268	24.67	5.107
TOTAL.SUM.ENVIRONMENTAL	BEGINNER	84	17.04	3.705
	INTERMEDIATE	93	15.54	2.603
	ADVANCED	91	17.32	4.593
	Total	268	16.65	3.797
TOTAL.SUM.GENERALSATISFACTION. DIMENSION	BEGINNER	84	31.70	2.181
	INTERMEDIATE	93	21.29	5.597
	ADVANCED	91	24.00	10.312
	Total	268	25.53	8.236

Table 2 is conducted to compare the mean scores of the three groups considering different dimensions the first row shows that beginners got the highest mean score of 13.74 and the intermediate group got the lowest mean score of 11.04 in the instructor dimension. By looking at the mean scores of the groups in the course dimension row, it is obvious that the beginners had the highest mean score and the intermediate group had the lowest mean score among all. Considering the third dimension, it is clear that the highest score 27.22 is devoted to the beginner group and the lowest mean score to the advanced group. Regarding the environmental dimension, the advanced group is seen with the highest mean score of 17.32, and the intermediate group with the lowest mean Score of 15.54. Regarding the general e-learning satisfaction dimension, the highest mean score of 31.70 is for beginners and the lowest mean score of 21.29 for intermediates.

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics were used to answer the research question and reject/retain the null hypothesis. To do this, six one-way ANOVAs were run. The first one-way ANOVA was employed to check any probable significant differences between the online learning satisfaction of all the participants in the three proficiency levels. Moreover, five other one-way ANOVAs were run to check the participants' attitudes regarding the five dimensions of the questionnaire. In addition, graphs were provided wherever necessary to have a better insight into the results. Before employing these tests, however, the normality of the distributions was explored using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Results of the Normality Tests

Three normality tests were conducted for the groups by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the associated tables and figures showed the normality of data in beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups where the p-values of the three groups were more than .05 which proved the data to be normal.

Results of One-way ANOVA

During the data analysis procedure, in addition to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality, a one-way ANOVA was run to see the probable significant difference in the online

learning satisfaction of the three proficiency levels. In addition, to compare the participants' attitudes with different proficiency levels toward the different dimensions of online learning satisfaction, five other one-way ANOVAs were employed to answer the research question.

Table 6

Results of one-way ANOVA for comparing the beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups regarding online learning satisfaction

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9840.114	2	4920.057	11.413	.000

As Table 6 shows, the significance value is .000, which is less than .05 which means that there is a significant difference between the three groups. To check where the differences lay, a post hoc test needs to be conducted.

Table 7

Results of post hoc test investigating the difference between beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups on the whole questionnaire

Tukey HSD				
(I) LEVEL	(J) LEVEL	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	25.475*	5.600	.000
	ADVANCED	19.780*	5.465	.001
INTERMEDIATE	BEGINNER	-25.475*	5.600	.000
	ADVANCED	-5.695	5.413	.546
ADVANCED	BEGINNER	-19.780*	5.465	.001
	INTERMEDIATE	5.695	5.413	.546

Table 7 shows the significant difference between beginner and advanced groups and also between intermediate and advanced groups.

Table 8

Results of one-way ANOVA for beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups considering the instructor dimension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	103.199	2	51.600	5.434	.006

According to the significant value estimated in Table 8 which is less than 05, there is a significant difference between the satisfaction level of the groups in the instructor dimension.

Table 9

Results of post hoc test investigating the difference between beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups on the instructor dimension

Tukey HSD				
(I) LEVEL	(J) LEVEL	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	2.705*	.831	.005
	ADVANCED	1.741	.811	.087
INTERMEDIATE	BEGINNER	-2.705*	.831	.005
	ADVANCED	-.964	.803	.456
ADVANCED	BEGINNER	-1.741	.811	.087
	INTERMEDIATE	.964	.803	.456

The difference in this dimension lies between beginner and intermediate groups.

Table 10

Results of one-way ANOVA for beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups considering the course dimension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1020.098	2	510.049	8.627	.000

The significant value in Table 10 clearly defines the significant difference in the satisfaction of the three groups considering the course dimension.

Table 11

Results of post hoc test investigating the difference between beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups on the course dimension

Tukey HSD				
(I) LEVEL	(J) LEVEL	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	8.341*	2.074	.000
	ADVANCED	6.039*	2.024	.010
INTERMEDIATE	BEGINNER	-8.341*	2.074	.000
	ADVANCED	-2.302	2.005	.487
ADVANCED	BEGINNER	-6.039*	2.024	.010
	INTERMEDIATE	2.302	2.005	.487

The post hoc test clearly shows the difference between the beginner and intermediate groups and between the beginner and advanced groups.

Table 12

Results of one-way ANOVA for beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups considering the technology dimension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	313.379	2	156.690	6.832	.002

The significant value in Table 12 which is less than .05, clearly shows a significant difference in satisfaction of the three groups considering the technology dimension.

Table 13

Results of post hoc test investigating the difference between beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups on the technology dimension

Tukey HSD				
(I) LEVEL	(J) LEVEL	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	2.795	1.292	.084
	ADVANCED	4.646*	1.261	.001
INTERMEDIATE	BEGINNER	-2.795	1.292	.084
	ADVANCED	1.851	1.249	.304
ADVANCED	BEGINNER	-4.646*	1.261	.001
	INTERMEDIATE	-1.851	1.249	.304

Results of the post hoc test express that the difference lies between the beginner and advanced groups.

Table 14

Results of one-way ANOVA for beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups considering the environmental dimension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	52.833	2	26.417	1.870	.161

The significant value in Table 14 clearly shows the non-existence of any difference in the satisfaction level of the groups considering the environmental dimension.

Table 15

Results of one-way ANOVA for beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups considering the general e-learning satisfaction dimension

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1606.051	2	803.026	16.024	.000

As Table 15 indicates, the significant value between groups is less than .05, which shows a significant difference between the satisfaction level of the three groups in the general e-learning satisfaction dimension.

Table 16

Results of post hoc test investigating the difference between beginner, intermediate, and advanced groups on the general e-learning satisfaction dimension

Tukey HSD				
(I) LEVEL	(J) LEVEL	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	10.418*	1.909	.000
	ADVANCED	7.704*	1.863	.000
INTERMEDIATE	BEGINNER	-10.418*	1.909	.000
	ADVANCED	-2.714	1.846	.310
ADVANCED	BEGINNER	-7.704*	1.863	.000
	INTERMEDIATE	2.714	1.846	.310

Considering the results of the post hoc test, the difference lies between the beginner and intermediate groups and also between the beginner and advanced groups in the general e-learning satisfaction dimension.

As a result, based on the findings of the present study from the data analysis, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between the satisfaction level of the beginner and advanced group learners in that, advanced learners showed more willingness and were more satisfied in comparison to the beginners showing more reluctance to online learning during Covid-19 pandemic.

Discussion

Regarding the importance of online learning, the present study aimed at comparing Iranian EFL learners' online learning satisfaction during the Covid-19 pandemic at three proficiency levels. To gain this target, a research question guided the present research which is going to be answered in this section.

As it was previously mentioned, the research question was after investigating whether there are any significant differences in online learning satisfaction of Iranian EFL learners at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of language proficiency. To answer this research question, six one-way ANOVAs were employed. A one-way ANOVA was run to check any significant differences between the satisfaction of all the participants at three proficiency levels, and five other one-way ANOVAs were run to check their attitudes toward different dimensions of the questionnaire.

The findings of this study revealed that there was a significant difference in the satisfaction level

of beginner and advanced learners towards online learning. Since, to the researcher's best knowledge, few pieces of research have ever investigated different proficiency levels in online learning satisfaction, the discussion section does not include the relative effect of language proficiency in online education. The findings contradict the results of Zarei and Zarei (2015), who found that the proficiency level of Iranian EFL learners does not influence their motivation and autonomy.

The results of the present study were partly in line with Zamberg, Schiffer, and Stoermann-Chopard's (2021) study, in which advanced learners showed more satisfaction in comparison with novice students who had moderate satisfaction towards online learning because they were more satisfied with the blended teaching instructional design and it was concluded that case-based e-learning activities might be more appropriate for advanced learners and could increase their satisfaction.

Moreover, the results of the present study are different from those of Yousefi, Vosoughi, and Alemi (2017), who conducted research on the perceptions of more proficient and less proficient learners of teachers' motivation-raising strategies. They found that more proficient participants showed significantly less perceptions of teachers' motivation-raising strategies and less proficient learners showed significantly more perceptions of teacher strategies for motivation-raising.

The results of the present study are in line with research by Rezaei and Jafarpour (2013), who aimed to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' language proficiency and their metaphorical competence and the results revealed that the more proficient the learners were, the more metaphorically competent they would be. The results of the current study are in line with that of Sotoudehnama and Morsali (2015) who investigated the relationship between vocabulary learning via the two techniques of antonymous and semantically unrelated sets among Iranian EFL learners with different proficiency levels and different genders. The results showed that the participants in the semantically unrelated sets group who were more proficient outperformed their less proficient peers in the antonymous sets group.

Conclusions

According to the results acquired from this study, beginners, in comparison to advanced learners, showed more reluctance towards online learning as did the intermediate group participants. As it was mentioned previously, this difference may be because of the difference in the participants' level of proficiency and age.

According to the results of the present study, it can be deduced that the more proficient the participants are, the more satisfied with online instruction they will be. Moreover, it can also be concluded that the older the participants get, the more satisfied they will be with online instruction, which might be due to the different reasons stated before. However, as this research was conducted in one context with a limited sample, results may vary if any of the variables change. Therefore, there is a need for more pieces of research using different variables, designs, and conditions.

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