



Good learner's features in EFL and Non-EFL online courses

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Abstract

The current study attempted to compare the attitudes of IELTS students studying at an institute and nursing students at a university on the attributes and features of successful learners in online classes. For this purpose, three experienced university professors were interviewed and six themes were extracted: digital literacy, learner autonomy, initiative, motivation, learners' attitude, and accountability. These themes were used in a questionnaire to ask about the attitudes of the two groups of the participants mentioned. The qualitative data on their in-depth ideas were collected via a section headed 'comment' in the questionnaire and interview of the participants. The results of the Chi-square tests of independence showed that both groups of students agreed on all features except attitudes and motivations. The result of the qualitative data analysis revealed that both groups were cognizant of the importance of these features to be successful and good students in online classes and without them, they could not make the best use of these classes. However, on the variables of attitude and motivations, contrary to students of institutes who had positive ideas, university students had negative motivations and attitudes about online classes. The findings can have implications for the parties involved.

Keywords: Good learners' features; online classes; perception,

1. INTRODUCTION

Ministries of education worldwide had no choice but to accept the paradigm shift in education and opt for online classes, an unprecedented strategy in the history of education worldwide and in Iran. Therefore, the concept of online classes or E-learning, coined by Gutierrez et al., (1999) which was mainly a theoretical concept with minor cases of real manifestation suddenly became a glaringly omnipresent reality that was there to stay for an unforeseen period.

Even though there is no unanimity among the experts on the definition of the term E-learning (Abaidoo & Arkorful 2000), in the definition proposed by most of them, (Tao, et al. 2006; Twig (2002), explicitly or implicitly learners are regarded as the indispensable part whose success and failure or the level of their satisfaction of this system is considered as the ultimate criterion for evaluation of this type of education. The corollary that can be drawn is that all of the positive points outlined by the experts, such as the rising popularity of online learning (Dumford & Miller, 2018), avoiding all risks involved in physical classes at the time of Covid 19 (Nguyen et al., 2020), offering innovative and time-efficient platform (Moise et al., 2021), launching different software adaptive with online learning to make it a pleasant experience (Burlacu, et al., 2013) and many more features and advantages that the proponent of this system can pride over; it is an undeniable fact that all of these points can only be considered advantages if they are approved by and are in line with the learners' preferences and likes who are supposed to attend these classes. Therefore, it can be said that in designing different aspects of online classes and related technology, the experts should always have an eye on the features of the learners as the final users of the product and predict their perceptions of what they design; otherwise, the history of language learning and teaching has witnessed the appearance and disappearance of many approaches, methods and design which had to relinquish the floor to their rivals because they could not live up to the expectations of the learners or teachers (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). It is hypothesized in the current study that it is the learners' features that act as the final arbiter in this regard and by that token, it should be taken into account.

From another perspective, learners themselves too have always desired to be aware of features that can turn them into successful ones and boost the level of their productivity and efficiency in such a learning method and be equipped with respected traits. To fill this gap, many studies have been conducted to find out the features of good language learners in the field of EFL/ESL (Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Griffiths, 2015; Macaro, 2004; Rozália, 2022) to familiarize other learners of the features of successful and efficacious language learners so that they can try to adopt some of these features to improve their learning habit. Due to prevalence of the online education which has been an integral part of mainstream education in the world, it is important to conduct similar studies on the features of successful language learners in this type of class too because it sounds reasonable to assume that although the ultimate objective of these online classes is similar to the mainstream ones, they do have marked differences from what most of the learners experiences in usual physical classes (Allen & Seaman, 2004; Yukselturk & Bulut, 2009); or the challenges that these classes pose (Behzadi & Ghaffari, 2011; Kebritchi, et al., 2017; Núñez, et al., 2016) requires certain features or characteristics on the part of learners to cope with them and benefit the most from these classes.

Therefore, the question would whether all students benefit from online sounds a relevant concern. The existing literature is supportive of the idea that EFL learners should either possess certain traits or if they don't, they should develop a certain set of skills to be successful online learners. This can be expanded to their trait or personality factors too; either they should have certain features or should develop the necessary features to function viably in these classes. According to Dabbagh (2007), if they lack these features, the quality of their education might be affected negatively to varying degrees.

An important point is that by highlighting the concept of successful learner features in online classes, it sounds unreasonable to jump to the conclusion that there are two distinct sets of features for good language learners, one set for traditional and the other set for online or virtual classes. Rather, even though some features might

contradict each other in these two modes of learning situations, it sounds logical to consider them coming from the same source; the desire to succeed, however different types of features are activated to suit the requirements or expectations of the instructional system in which the learners are involved. For example, the concept of learner autonomy as an important concept in learning a language (Ahmed Abdel-Al Ibrahim & Hashemifardnia 2024; Balçikanli, 2010; Najeeb, 2013; Araka et al., 2020), though might keep playing its vital role in online classes, should work in tandem with digital literacy another equally important feature which is restricted to online classes (Lee, 2014; Yustika & Iswati, 2020; Kerimbayev et al., 2023). The interaction between the features of good learners in traditional classes and those emerging or developing in online cases can be considered an important issue to investigate too.

In the same vein, Stoter, et al., (2014) distinguished other learners' features that are more relevant to online classes than the face-to-face ones; features such as students' sense of individuality and attitudes towards learning in online form mark some differences from the face-to-face form of schooling. The other features are the level of self-directedness, the level of enthusiasm, and time-related matters such as availability, flexibility, and space which are more pertinent to online education due to its different characteristics from face-to-face ones (Cheng et al., 2023). The concept of self-directedness is especially important because learners need to be initiative and resourceful in defining their short and long-term goals and objectives and finding the solutions to the problems they may encounter in their virtual learning (Kim et al., 2014; Song & Hill, 2007; Song, et al., 2022; El-Gazar et al., 2024), as the level of the teachers' presence is diminished, the learners' self-directedness and enthusiasm should go up to strike a balance for the diminishing role of the presence of the teachers, in its traditional form. Another related feature that, though not exclusive to online classes, is more evident in this type of education, is the ability or characteristic of time management due to differences in two forms of learning; the fact that learners can attend online classes wherever and whenever they can or prefer and that they are free from the restriction of time and space imposed on them in face-to-face classes can be beneficial (Michinov, et al., 2011; Nawrot & Doucet, 2014; Sánchez & Karaksha 2023), provided they can manage these factors to their advantage; it cannot be all useful for everyone and to reap the benefits of these features, the learners either should have the required features or develop them.

1.1. Purpose of study

On the issue of features of successful or good learners in online classes, equally important is the comparative investigation of instructors vs. learners' attitudes on this matter, to find out what features these two main stakeholders regard as important and whether there is any agreement or disagreement between them in considering an attribute important or negligible to be a viable member of these classes. The reason for comparing the perception of these two parties is an assumption that there should be some similarity between them otherwise; the class of perceptions between EFL teachers and learners might lead to other sorts of challenges in the form of dissatisfaction, disappointments, boredom, in the virtual instructional milieu. The research conducted in the literature attests to the significance of considering the attitudes and perceptions of both of these parties (Baz, et al., 2016; Hamouda; 2011; Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012). The current study attempted to compare the attitudes of IELTS students studying at an institute and nursing students at a university on the attributes and features of successful learners in online classes.

Based on what was stated, the following research questions were posed in this study:

1. What are the key attributes of successful and efficacious online learners from the professors' points of view?
2. How do the learners perceive the notion of being successful in passing an English online course effectively?

1. METHODS AND MATERIALS

In this section, the features of the design of the study, participants, materials, data collection procedure, and data analysis will be explained.

2.1 Design of the Study

The current study was a descriptive study that included both qualitative and quantitative phases, making it a mixed method (Creswell, & Clark, 2007). It aimed to find out the important personality traits that were conducive to success in online classes. From another perspective, because it had no control over the selection of the participants and used convenience sampling, it was quasi-experiential research.

2.2 Participants

The participants in the current study were two groups of students; the first group was 30 undergraduate students who studied nursing at the University of Science and Technology. The second group comprising 30, was from an IELTS were learners from different fields who attended these classes to prepare for the IELTS exam, mainly for immigration. The age range of all participants was 19-30 and they were all Iranian with different tongues and Persian as their official language.

Besides the aforementioned students, three university professors took part in the current study. They all had their PhDs in TEFL and had at least ten years of experience teaching English as a foreign language at the university at different levels, to students of other majors studying English for Specific Purpose (ESP) or students EFL learners or students of translation studies

2.3 Data collection instruments

The main instrument for the current study constituted an interview with three experienced university instructors. This interview was a semi-structured one to give structure to the interview but at the same theme, they had the freedom to comment on the points and issues, elaborate on them, and add their features for the good learners for online classes. From the result of the interview, a questionnaire was devised and the qualities extracted were used to seek the perceptions of the students from the university and the institutes.

Besides the agreement and disagreement, a column was added to the questionnaire in which the participants were asked to add their comments with certain features or why they had certain attitudes about its significance. The validity of the questionnaire was checked by two other experienced instructors. The points covered included characteristic traits such as self-directed learning; digital literacy and familiarity with technological devices, learner autonomy, having the initiative to deal with the problems faced a sense of accountability for their successful learning, and the importance of discipline and preparedness for optimal use of the class.

2.4 Data collection procedures

At first, the three university instructors with more than 15 years of teaching experience were interviewed on the necessary features of good learners for online classes. Based on the collected data and after the theme extraction, the features, and characteristics of the good language learners were presented to the participants from the university and institute in the form of a questionnaire to see if they agreed or disagreed on those qualities or if the level of their agreement or disagreement were significant. Besides the agreement or disagreement section which required ticking, another column was added heading 'comment' under which they were asked to explain in as much depth as they thought appropriate for their choice. This was used in the qualitative section. Besides this, the willing participants to take part in the interview were interviewed to have in-depth information about their preferences.

2.5 Data analysis

Because the current study included both qualitative and quantitative aspects, consequently, data analysis was both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative data analysis was on the transcripts of the interviews with the university instructors. The transcripts were studied carefully and the recurrent themes were identified and tabulated for types and tokens (frequency of occurrence). The quantitative data analysis was on the frequency of the students' responses on the questionnaire constituting the themes extracted from the interview with the university instructors. The frequency of their responses on different issues was determined. A Chi-square analysis test for independence was used to determine whether both groups of participants from the university and the institutes agreed or disagreed on these themes and whether their agreement or disagreement reached a significant level.

2. RESULTS

The result of the semi-structured interview with the three university instructors is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Professors' attitudes on different good learners' features in online classes

Theme	Professor one	Professor two	Professor three
Digital literacy	Necessary rather than important. Minimum literacy is required for optimal functioning.	If digital literacy is absent, one cannot expect any learning to take place online.	Digital literacy is the only way available to gain information online. There is no other way.
Learner autonomy	A crucial factor in learning, especially in this new situation that necessitates it	Important but a new and extended redefinition of autonomy is required which is more than independence from the teacher and it includes choice of sourcebooks and being initiative.	It improves learners' critical thinking since they have to be able to find solutions for their problems independently.
Initiative	Due to the physical absence of the instructor being initiative seems important.	Too much dependence on the teacher of the others be counterproductive in online classes due to the physical distance in the form of learning.	Either the learner should possess this feature or the need to develop it to cope with the unforeseen problems emerging during the course.
Motivation	Motivation is a common feature for good learners in physical and online classes but more of it is required in online classes due to the challenges involved with online classes.	Motivation should include two parts, learning the contents of the lesson and learning technological points related to online learning which appear daily.	It might be insufficient if motivation is for learning or mastery of the course material. It needs to be multifaceted if a desirable goal is to be materialized.
Accountability	This sense is more important in online classes than the physical ones because the learners seem to be more on their own	This feature is important in both forms of online and physical classes because unless a learner is held accountable, they cannot consider teachers or other people responsible for their failure.	Both theoretical and practical considerations attest to the significance of this construct. Learner accountability is undeniably important from any perspective.
Learners' attitude	Many extraneous factors can contribute to learners' positive and negative attitudes among	Again, the concepts must be considered carefully.	It does affect the quality of learning. In this ever-dynamic world where the information

the main ones being quality and the speed of the internet as well as the cost-effectiveness of online learning, in the case of Iran all of these factors wreak havoc on learners' positive attitudes.	Depending on how and to what extent online classes can affect the quality of learners' lives, their attitudes can be either negative or positive, hence affecting their education in general.	flow is mind-boggling, a positive attitude to learning can pave the way to coping with this.
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As can be seen in Table 1, the features of digital literacy, learner autonomy, initiative, motivation, accountability, and learners' attitude were singled out to be the features that learners can have to be considered good or efficacious learners in the online educational system. A point that needs to be stressed is that the features or characteristics of good language learners for online classes cannot be restricted to these and other characteristics can be included too; depending on many factors such as attitudes, perceptions, teaching experiences, the educational system one had gone through, personality traits of the interviewees, among the other influential factors. Another point concerning Table 1 is that not only the features themselves but also the reasons or rationales for singling them out can be different from the ones stated by the university professors who were interviewed and the same caveat needs to be borne in mind in interpreting this and the subsequent data analysis and the results.

In the next phase of the study, these themes were used to ask about the learners' attitudes toward them, the participants from the university, and the ones from an IELTS institute. The reason for comparing the attitudes or perceptions of these two groups on these themes is the differences that are posited in these two educational organizations. The first and the most conspicuous one was the fact that to enter the university, the participants had to pass the entrance exam which is a high-stakes test in Iran with a lot of consequential and social-related validity issues (Messick, 2013). The motivation for attending university in Iran is more instrumental than intrinsic and a considerable number of students pursue their education to get a degree to increase their chances of employment (Fadaee Khorasgani, 2008). These two features are in opposition to language institutes in general and IELTS institute as a case in point in the current study for which there is no entrance exam and the sole reason for attendance is improving the general English proficiency to sit the IELTS exam, mainly for immigration for the vast majority of the learners.

In this part, the comparative frequency analysis of university vs. institute students' perception of the good students' features for online classes will be presented. For this purpose, a Chi-square test of independence will be used to see if they agree or disagree on these points and if their agreement or disagreement reaches a significant point. Each quantitative analysis will be followed by presenting their perceptions (written in the comment section of the questionnaire) to have a thorough view of what they think about each feature. The first point is digital literacy. The results are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics on University vs. Institute Students' Perceptions of the Digital Literacy

Educational organization			Digital literacy		Total	
			agree	disagree		
university	Count		24	5	29	
	Expected Count		25.1	3.9	29.0	
	institute	Count		27	3	30
		Expected Count		25.9	4.1	30.0
Total	Count		51	8	59	
	Expected Count		51.0	8.0	59.0	

As can be seen in Table 2, twenty-four university students and 27 institute students agreed that digital literacy was an important feature for a good student attending online classes. The result of the chi-square test of independence in Table 3 shows if the difference between these two frequencies is significant.

Table 3

Chi-Square Tests of Independence on University vs. Institute Students Perceptions on the Digital Literacy

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.660 ^a	1	.417		
Continuity Correction ^b	.187	1	.666		
Likelihood Ratio	.665	1	.415		
Fisher's Exact Test				.472	.334
Linear-by-Linear Association	.649	1	.421		
N of Valid Cases	59				

a. 0 cells (, 0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.12

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

The first point that must be checked in Table 3 is whether the assumption of minimum expected cell has been violated, i.e. all cells should be 5 or greater (or at least 80 percent of cells have expected frequencies of 5 or more). This information is given in a footnote below the table labeled Chi-Square Tests. Footnote b in the example provided indicates that '0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5'. This means that we have not violated the assumption, as our entire expected cell sizes are greater than 5. In the chi-square tests Table 3, the main value that we are interested in from the output is the Pearson chi-square value. Since Table 3 is a 2 by 2 table (i.e. each variable has only two categories), the continuity correction in the second row should be consulted. This is Yates' Correction for Continuity (which compensates for the overestimate of the chi-square value when used with a 2 by 2 table), in this case, the corrected value. In the example presented above the corrected value is .187, with an associated significance level of .666 (this is presented in the column labeled Asymp. Sig. (2-sided). To be significant the Sig. Value needs to be .05 or smaller. In this case, the value of .666 is larger than the alpha value of .05, so we can conclude that our result is not significant. This means that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of participants from two different educational organizations (university vs. institute) on the significance of digital literacy as the required feature of a good student for online classes.

The result of the qualitative data collected from the comment section of the questionnaire and the interview revealed that in line with the perception expressed by the university professors, the participants from two education organizations believed that digital literacy was tantamount to being a viable member of online education, without which the learners are hopeless. Another point stated by the students which was not mentioned by the professor was the sense of anxiety experienced when a student lacks the required digital literacy, the sense of lagging was a traumatic experience for some of them. According to some of them, this negative feeling was accentuated due to the irresponsiveness of the people in charge of the technical support whose unavailability might have been due to a large number of requests at the time of online classes. The other equally important point stated was that as they moved on, the level of their anxiety diminished not because of their improving digital literacy but because of their awareness that they could manage the problem with the scaffold from a peer who was more literate than they were. The next point is the sense of accountability. The result is presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics on University vs. Institute Students Perceptions of the Sense of Accountability the Participants

organization			Accountability		Total
			agree	disagree	
university	Count	22	7		29
	Expected Count	23.6	5.4		29.0
institute	Count	26	4		30
	Expected Count	24.4	5.6		30.0
Total	Count	48	11		59

Expected Count 48.0 11.0 59.0

According to the result of the data analysis presented in Table 4, more students studying IELTS at the institutes considered accountability as an important feature for a good student in online education (22 vs. 26). The result in Table 5 shows if this difference is significant.

Table 5
Chi-Square Tests of Independence on University vs. Institute Students Perceptions on the Sense of Accountability the Participants

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.135 ^a	1	.287		
Continuity Correction ^b	.534	1	.465		
Likelihood Ratio	1.145	1	.285		
Fisher's Exact Test				.333	.233
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.116	1	.291		
N of Valid Cases	59				

a. 0 cells (, 0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5, 41.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

As shown in Table 5, the value for continuity correction is .534 with $p = .465$, indicating that there is no significant difference between these two groups regarding accountability as an important feature for successful students in online education.

The result of the qualitative data collected from the comment section and the interview indicated that both groups were aware of the significance of this feature not only in online education but in their mainstream classes too. A point raised by some of them was that the education system in Iran failed to develop this sense in students at different levels. The reason they mentioned was the teacher-centered educational system in Iran which did not encourage students to be aware of their role in their education and learning. The other equally important point which was mentioned by some of the participants could be attributed to what is known as external locus of control based on which the person has little control over their affairs because most of the things are determined by external forces. This rallied against their sense of accountability because against such a deterministic attitude, they had little choice or freedom to be held accountable. Closely related to the feature accountability, is learners' autonomy which is considered an important EFL learner feature in mainstream classes. The results of the perceptions of two groups of participants are shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics on University vs. Institute Students Perceptions on the Sense of Learner Autonomy in Online Education

organization	university	Count	Learner autonomy		Total
			agree	disagree	
		21	8		29
		Expected Count	22.2	6.8	29.0
	institute	Count	25	6	31
		Expected Count	23.8	7.2	31.0
Total		Count	46	14	60
		Expected Count	46.0	14.0	60.0

According to the results of descriptive statistics, 21 of the university students and 25 of the IELTS learners in an institute agreed that this is an important learner feature for online classes. Table 7 shows if this difference in frequency is meaningful.

Table 7
Chi-Square Tests of Independence on University vs. Institute Students Perceptions on the Sense of Learner Autonomy

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.568 ^a	1	.451		
Continuity Correction ^b	.201	1	.654		
Likelihood Ratio	.568	1	.451		
Fisher's Exact Test				.547	.327
Linear-by-Linear Association	.558	1	.455		
N of Valid Cases	60				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.77.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

As presented in Table 7, the value for continuity correction is .201 which is not significant ($p=.654$), indicating that both university students and IELTS candidates in a language institute consider learner autonomy to be an important feature of a successful learner in online education.

The result of the qualitative data collected from the comment section and the interview showed that in both groups (with minor differences), developing autonomy is indispensable. Of course, they disagreed on their definition of autonomy; while for some of them, autonomy meant taking responsibility for their learning, for the majority, it meant being independent of their teacher and the system, which is rather a misconception on this term and it sounds incumbent on their instructors to update their attitude about the meaning of this concept. The next point of interest was initiative or resourcefulness. The result is presented in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics on University vs. Institute Students' Perceptions of the Sense of Being Initiative in Online Education

organization		Count	initiative		Total
			agree	disagree	
university	Count	22	7	29	
	Expected Count	22.6	6.4	29.0	
	institute	Count	24	6	30
		Expected Count	23.4	6.6	30.0
Total	Count	46	13	59	
	Expected Count	46.0	13.0	59.0	

As presented in Table 8, twenty-two university students and 24 IELTS students agreed on this feature for a successful student in online classes. The result of the Chi-square is presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Chi-Square Tests of Independence on University vs. Institute Students Perceptions on the Sense of Being Initiative in Online Education

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.147 ^a	1	.701		
Continuity Correction ^b	.005	1	.945		
Likelihood Ratio	.147	1	.701		
Fisher's Exact Test				.761	.472
Linear-by-Linear Association	.144	1	.704		
N of Valid Cases	59				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.39.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

The continuity correction shows that there is no significant difference between the two groups of participants on their perceptions about the importance of being initiative in inline classes (value = .005, $p = .945$). The result of the qualitative data indicates that this feature is specifically important for most of the students due to the unforeseen problems that they face regularly; including low internet speed, constant interruption in connectivity, technical glitches, and problems associated with the lack of copyrights in Iran that is imposed on them and they have to be initiative to find a way in online classes and in the absence of this feature, they cannot learn well in this type of education. The next variable that was investigated was the attitudes that the participants had about online education. The result is presented in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics on University vs. Institute Students' Perceptions of Their Attitudes about Online Education

			Attitude about online		Total
			positive	negative	
organization	university	Count	10	19	29
		Expected Count	15.0	14.0	29.0
	institute	Count	20	9	29
		Expected Count	15.0	14.0	29.0
Total		Count	30	28	58
		Expected Count	30.0	28.0	58.0

According to the result presented in Table 10, contrary to previous cases, the difference in frequency is very much, while 10 university students had a positive attitude about online classes, 20 IELTS students studying in the institutes had a positive attitude about this mode of education. The result of the Chi-square shows if there is a significant difference between these two statistics.

Table 11

Chi-Square Tests of Independence on University vs. Institute Students Perceptions on Their Attitudes about Online Education

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.905 ^a	1	.009		
Continuity Correction ^b	5.593	1	.018		
Likelihood Ratio	7.049	1	.008		
Fisher's Exact Test				.017	.009
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.786	1	.009		
N of Valid Cases	58				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.00.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

According to the data in Table 10, the value for continuity correction is 5.59 ($p = .018$), indicating that there is a significant difference between university students and institute students in their attitudes about online classes.

The result of the qualitative data showed some reasons for this case. The first reason mentioned by the university students was that because of their courses such as nursing or different types of engineering, they preferred their classes to be physical and face-to-face so that they could learn most of the practical subjects better. The other problem was online classes could not prepare them for the everyday problems that they had to be ready to be a viable member of the professional community in their respective fields. This included emergency cases in nursing such as tacking patients in emergency wards, w situation that cannot be simulated in online classes, and because of that the quality of their education and qualifications comes down; a sad point that the patients or other parties involved had to hear the brunt. A similar case was mentioned by engineering students and the practical issues involved in these fields. Concerning the IELTS students, not that the situation was rosy

altogether, but most of them stated that most of what they needed could be learned satisfactorily via online education.

There was similarity between the two groups on other issues. Both groups had positive attitudes toward the time efficiency of the online classes because this obviated the problem of commuting and consequently wasting time they had experienced in physical classes. The next point was that some of the participants in both groups acknowledged and enjoyed the privacy they had with online classes since they could choose where to attend the classes. On the other hand, for other participants from both groups, the very privacy meant a low level of socialization in this type of class which had its indelible mark on them during the lockdown. Similarly, for some of them, lack of physical communication resulted in tedium since all they could do was look at a monitor trying to keep focused which proved too much for some. The last point was the motivation; the results are presented in Tables 12 and 13.

Table 12
Descriptive Statistics on University vs. Institute Students' Perceptions of Their Motivation of Online Education

			motivation		Total
			positive	negative	
organization	university	Count	11	18	29
		Expected Count	15.5	13.5	29.0
	institute	Count	21	10	31
		Expected Count	16.5	14.5	31.0
Total	Count		32	28	60
	Expected Count		32.0	28.0	60.0

According to the result of the data analysis presented in Table 12, eleven university students had a positive motivation to be in online classes and the frequency was 21 IELTS candidates in the institutes. Table 13 shows if these two frequencies are significantly different from each other.

Table 13
Chi-Square Tests of Independence on University vs. Institute Students' Perceptions of Their Motivation about Online Education

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.350 ^a	1	.021		
Continuity Correction ^b	4.219	1	.040		
Likelihood Ratio	5.429	1	.020		
Fisher's Exact Test				.037	.020
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.261	1	.022		
N of Valid Cases	60				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.53.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

The result of the chi-square in Table 12 shows that the value for continuity correction is 4.21 which is significant ($p=.04$), indicating that the students studying IELTS at the institute had significantly higher frequency of positive motivation about online classes compared to that of the university students.

The result of the qualitative data analysis showed that due to the virtual nature of the online classes and because a considerable number of subjects and lessons the university students have to learn are practical and project-based such as going through internship and practically doing what they have been instructed in lecture form in their classes, online classes could not satisfactorily meet the requirement and this in turn reduced their motivation to invest their utmost effort and energy for the online classes. According to some of them, this could

to a great extent be obviated if they had a mixed syllabus in which they could do part of their lesson in online format and the practical ones in the physical forms to achieve their instructional goal.

In the case of the learners studying at the institute for the IELTS exam, the case was less severe, since most of what they needed could be done via online classes. This included the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, all of which could be done optimally in the online format. In the case of speaking skills, even they had the freedom to choose interlocutors from different countries and become familiarized with different accents to improve their listening besides speaking skills. In the case of their writing and the feedback they needed to improve the quality of their writing, they could use some online application such as Grammarly, provided they paid attention to the nature of feedback and the correction provided by this program. They could also use the video clips from YouTube for useful tips about different aspects of this exam.

3. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be said that online classes can cause different and even sometimes opposite feelings in students with different majors and personality traits because of the interaction of many observable or unobservable factors. This means that because we are dealing with the attitudes, preferences, likes, and dislikes of human participants on a volatile topic of technology, we should be ready for a considerable level of complications and contradictions; a point which is emphasized by Zhao (2003) who states that the effectiveness of e-learning depends on many variables and the learner is the main factor for the success.

These results on the students' attitudes about online classes on which there was a significant difference between the university and the institute students in the current study gain support from Afroz et al., (2021) that showed that in the context of Bangladesh, students had positive attitudes about cost and time-effectiveness, and negative attitudes about low internet speed and insufficient digital literacy which reduced the effectiveness of online classes. Another similarity between the findings of the current study and this research is the issue of accountability which the participants on both groups considered a feature of successful learners. As far as students' attitudes are concerned another support comes from Ersalan and Topkaya (2017) whose findings in Turkey show that students have partly positive attitudes towards online courses, a point which was observed on the part of the students studying the institute on the current study, and was contrary to the attitudes of the university students who had negative attitudes because of the reason mentioned. However, Ersalan and Topkaya (2017) showed that a mere positive attitude about online courses did not guarantee students' success in preparatory classes, an indication that problems associated with online classes are not restricted to the Iranian context.

The negative attitude expressed by the university students in the current study who stated that their reason was that they had to attend the face-to-face mainstream classes for the practical course is the point that Anderson (2003) emphasizes too in that according to him, an optimal way to make the best use of online classes is using them in tandem or as a supplementary to mainstream classes and not as a replacement. It seems that only through this combination, one can consider students' attitudes about e-learning as a strong predictor of their success (Akbari, et al., 2012; Cinkara & Bagceci, 2013).

The concepts of learner autonomy and accountability which were considered significant features of successful learners in online classes in the current study, could be interpreted as signs of internal locus of control, and from this perspective, they seem to be in line with Knowles and Kerkman (2007) who found that students in their study had a strong internal locus of control. Also, their data analysis revealed a significant correlation between a more internal locus of control and relying on surface strategies for learning in online classes. This could be because, in this type of education, students have to attribute their success and failure to internal forces since most of the time they are on their own in online classes.

The notion of digital literacy as one of the features of successful online learners in this study gains support from Inan Karagul, et al., (2021) who stated that the sudden transition from physical classes to online ones causes such a necessity to be digitally literate. They also found that there was a significant relationship between students' digital literacy and their gender and school degree, while age was not found to be a statistically significant variable. According to their results, learners believed that they had digital literacy required for online classes and what they needed was the technological facilities to match their digital literacy indicating that these two should be parallel to be effective.

5. CONCLUSION

The current study attempted to investigate the perception of two groups of students in Iran; those who studied nursing at university and the other studying IELTS at an institute. The themes were derived from interviews with three experienced university professors. Using Chi-square tests of independence, the result of the quantitative data analysis revealed that the two groups unanimously agreed on the importance of digital literacy, accountability, learner autonomy, and initiative as features of good and successful learners in online classes. However, they differed significantly on two variables of motivation and attitude; while IELTS students at the institute had positive attitudes and motivation to attend online classes, the nursing students at the university showed negative feelings about these two attributes.

The result of the qualitative data analysis collected from the interview with the university professors and the comment sections of the questionnaire showed that both groups of students were aware of the significance of the variables studied as important attributes of successful learners because each of them played its key role in using the online classes optimally. The reasons mentioned for the negative feelings of university students on their attitudes and motivation was that due to their field of study, they did need physical classes with face-to-face communication to be prepared for their functioning in the real world. In fact, without these practical classes, their education as nursing students could be completed.

The findings can have implications for all stakeholders in that they can recognize that the concept of good learners can be true not only for usual mainstream classes but for online ones too and even some new attributes and features should be recognized that might be different from the ones in mainstream classes.

Future studies can do comparative studies on other fields to find out the more domain-specific features or good learners of online classes. They can also determine the common points among students from diverse fields to come up with a unified entry which can be of help to online platform designers.

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