



Research Paper

The Effect of Personality Traits, Class Level, and Gender on EFL Learners' Online Learning Acceptance among Tunisian University Students

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Abstract

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the transition from in-person instruction to online education. Most students in Tunisia repudiated such sudden transfer. This study, then, probes into factors that impact the online learning experience during the pandemic. Hence, it investigates the effect of affective variables, namely personality traits, on learners' acceptance of online learning in the Tunisian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) formal university context. Additionally, it scrutinizes the relationship between remote learning on the one hand and class level and gender on the other hand. The considered variables are gauged using a Likert-scale response format questionnaire. The subjects are 150 Tunisian EFL university students at the Higher Institute of Applied Studies in Humanities of Gafsa. The data analysis procedures used are the alpha internal consistency coefficient informing about the instrument's reliability and the Spearman Rho correlation, giving insight into the correlations among the study variables. The study found that personality represents a good predictor of learners' acceptance of distance learning. Regarding the class level, no significant correlation was found between this variable and acceptance of online learning. The same insignificant correlation was detected between gender and Internet-based learning. Hence, the study concludes that considering learners' differences is primordial in accounting for the success of EFL online courses.

Keywords: *Personality Traits; Online Learning; EFL; Class Level; Gender*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has successfully changed the world. This choking event compelled the global lockdown of numerous human activities, including educational ones, to curb the rapid virus spread ([World Health Organization, 2020](#)). Such a shutdown made life difficult for everyone worldwide; education is not an exception ([UNESCO, 2021](#)). On March 14, 2020, the Tunisian government, like many other countries, announced a state of emergency. Then, a period of total containment was imposed. So, people were obliged to stay home in response to government-issued stay-at-home orders. At that point, all schools and universities were officially closed definitively for the rest of the academic year. Then, like many other countries, the only solution to ensure continuous learning was to switch to virtual modes of teaching ([Hodges et al., 2020](#)). The Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research opted to adopt e-learning via the MDLP (Moodle Distance Learning Platform) of the virtual University of Tunis. Students' free access to the MDLP was ensured to encourage them to follow the online courses (17 April [press statement](#) posted on the Facebook page of the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research).

Hence, a new instructional norm was established "in haste" ([Persico et al., 2020](#)). Online learning, which is unprecedented in the Tunisian university setting, became the main medium of education during the university closure. For Tunisian university students, virtual learning was a new and different experience. The sudden transition from in-person schooling to synchronous and asynchronous teaching modes was rough for most students worldwide ([Carrillo & Flores, 2020](#); [Qi et al., 2021](#)). In responding to students' repudiation of online education, they were assessed only for what they learned during in-person sessions. So, at the time of the pandemic, distance learning

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was implemented but without students' assessments.

Such online, indoor, and Internet-based mode of learning has raised several challenges (Marinoni et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2020; Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). Full-time virtual learning has been linked to certain failures felt by learners. Reluctance to use such learning in the Tunisian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) formal university context has been apparent during forced migration to online learning. Despite the numerous potential advantages of using Internet-based education as a pedagogical tool in EFL instruction, its use in the Tunisian EFL formal university context has not gained much momentum. In the contemporary Tunisian educational environment, it is a pity that in most Tunisian universities, despite the availability of computer rooms, which is a privilege, there is not an optimum exploitation of online learning. Therefore, it would be vital to research factors that affect learners' experience with online learning in the Tunisian context during the COVID-19 crisis. Then, this survey focuses on the effect of individual differences, namely personality traits, class level, and gender, on online learning acceptance. It is worth mentioning that very few past research surveys have investigated the impact of learners' affective variables and demographic backgrounds on virtual learning acceptance, let alone in the Tunisian context. Thus, the present study is seen as meaningful and important.

Given the countless advantages of online learning (Levak & Song, 2017; Kato et al., 2016; Lee, 2007) and the likelihood that remote learning will continue to be a prominent feature of higher education. The present study attempts to probe into the reasons behind such unwillingness to undertake online courses by exploring the impact of individual differences, namely personality traits, class level, and gender, on EFL learners' experience with remote learning during the pandemic. The ultimate goal of the current survey is to inform virtual learning design in the Tunisian EFL formal university setting to make it a fruitful and enjoyable experience for the students. So, for the purpose of the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. Do students' personality traits determine online learning acceptance in the Tunisian EFL formal university context?
2. Does students' class level predict their acceptance of online learning?
3. Does gender correlate with online learning acceptance?

The present study comprises six sections: the first focuses on the rationale behind conducting such research. The second presents the theoretical framework upon which the survey rests. The third deals with the methodology and design of the study. The fourth display the results and discussion of the findings. The fifth provides a brief summary of the research aim, findings, conclusion, and implication drawn from it. The last concern with future research and limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review represents the theoretical core of an article. The purpose of a literature review is to "look again" at what other researchers have done regarding a specific topic. A literature review is a means to an end, namely to provide background to and serve as motivation for the objectives and hypotheses that guide one's own research. A good literature review should not merely provide a summary of previous relevant research; the researcher is also expected to critically evaluate, re-organize and synthesize the work of others.

Online Learning

Defining Online Learning

Online learning can be defined as "all types of learning in which learner(s) and instructor(s) are in the same place, at the same time, for learning to take place. It includes in-person classes, lives online meetings when the whole class or smaller groups get together" (Finol, 2020). Virtual learning

environments, also known as learning platforms, are made possible thanks to the advances in network technologies (Sarker et al., 2019; Saleh et al., 2022). Now, we can send voices over the Internet, which was mainly designed for data transmission using the Internet Protocol. It is how it works: a set of data is separated into individual packets; these packets are then transmitted from the sender to the designed receiver through the Internet. They can take different routes along the way but will be repackaged to the original format at the receiver's end. Therefore, thanks to "Voice-Over IP" technology, teachers and students are allowed to interact with each other in a setup called a "Virtual Classroom" from their homes or any other location (El Khuluqo et al., 2021).

In the online education method, which is computer or Internet-based, the classes are live and consist of a teacher and a small group of students who come together to learn online. The teacher leads the class and instructs students (Faramarzi et al., 2015). Unlike traditional instruction, which consists of regular classes, physical attendance, and face-to-face interaction between teacher and learners, virtual instruction does not require physical attendance, nor does it require face-to-face interaction. In a virtual classroom, the teacher and the students are all sitting in front of their computers somewhere. Therefore, virtual instruction takes place in an online environment as it relies on computer-mediated systems of communication. Teachers and students can see, listen, and speak to each other using their computers and microphones through the Internet (O'Rourke & Strickler, 2017; Ziegler, 2016).

A virtual classroom is very similar to a physical one (Blau et al., 2016). The virtual classroom also provides a social learning environment that replicates the traditional one:

1. When one person speaks, the rest of the students in the room will be able to listen.
2. A student needs "to raise his/her hand" to speak, typically by clicking a button on the screen.
3. The students can "write on a whiteboard", and the teacher, too, can write down keywords, sentences, etc.

Software Systems used in Virtual Environments

In learning platforms, a mix of communication technologies is often used. One example of Web-Conferencing software that allows students and teachers to communicate with each other via webcam, microphone, and real-time chatting in a group setting, is "Adobe Connect". It is sometimes utilized for meetings and presentations (Elekaei, 2022; Basaran & Yalma, 2020; Celikbas, 2018; Vurdien & Puranen, 2018). Participants in a virtual classroom can also use icons called "emoticons" to communicate feelings and responses to questions or statements. Students can even share their desktops when permitted to do so by the instructor. Other communication technologies available in a virtual classroom include text notes, microphone rights, and breakout sessions.

Another software system designed to help instructors manage online educational courses is the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (Elekaei et al., 2020). They generally include course content, communication tools, grading tools, student tracking, grouping facilities, and control over who accesses the course (Weller, 2007). VLEs are also known as "Platforms Managed Learning Environments" (MLEs) and "Learner Management Systems" (LMSs).

"Skype" can also be used to take language classes online (Foote, 2008; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2012; Gabriel et al., 2012; Taillefer & Munoz-Luna, 2014). Such a piece of software enables people to engage in voice chat. As long as the students own a computer equipped with high-speed Internet access, a microphone, and loudspeakers, they can take advantage of an online course. "Skype" is a wonderful piece of software to utilize, as it is simple to download and free of charge (Brophy, 2004). "Skype lessons" can also be used with most operating systems and computers.

Moodle, as a kind of open-sourced software, is the most popular software for presenting online lessons (Creixell & Ganter, 2016; Lien, 2015). This platform can house rather sophisticated

online courses. This software has many attributes: it is free and easy to use, pretty straightforward, and has a user-friendly setup (Al-Ajlan & Zedan, 2008; Wu, 2008). It is constantly being updated with new features. Seeing all these features that Moodle offers to its users, it is frequently being used in higher education for online learning. It seems to be the platform of choice for educators who are not affiliated with corporate or private investors.

Advantages of EFL Online Learning

The idea of virtual EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes is spurred by some problems frequently encountered in EFL learning situations. First, most EFL students do not live in an English-speaking environment, so they do not get much exposure to the target language. Second, students are often put in large groups. Thus, they do not get enough practice in the target language. Third, learners often have access to a limited range of resources, so when engaged in a virtual community, EFL learners may gain access to a larger amount of language resources and expand their exposure to an authentic target language (O'Donoghue et al., 2004). In this virtual world, EFL students can meet native speakers of English and be provided with a real context of language use which is often absent in formal language classes (Lee, 2007; AbuSeileek & Qatawneh, 2013; Guichon, 2010). EFL students will enjoy using the virtual world for both entertainment purposes and language learning.

Most virtual classroom applications provide a recording feature. All the interactions and materials produced will be recorded, making retrieving, analyzing, and sharing them easier. In that way, each class is recorded and stored on a server, which allows for instant playback of any class in the course of the school year. This can be extremely beneficial for learners who want to review materials and concepts for an upcoming exam. This also allows students to watch any class that they may have missed so that they do not fall behind. Hence, critical thinking and problem-solving skills are promoted (Sadeghi, 2019).

The recent proliferation of Internet access has led to explosive growth in the use of online instruction, which is potentially able to create opportunities for learners to be engaged in a learning community (Terzi & Celik, 2005). The latter often emphasizes the value of small class sizes, a close relationship between students and teachers, and a sense of community (Guichon & Cohen, 2014). Virtual communities may prove extremely beneficial for language learning. Indeed, it may safely state that when EFL learners become active members of a virtual community, they may learn how to interact, cooperate, and share things with real people; and become learners that are more involved (Jauregi & Bañados, 2008; Yang & Chen, 2014; Freiermuth & Huang, 2021). EFL virtual classes allow learners to have their unique 3D presence (Hauck & Satar, 2018; Develotte et al., 2010).

Unlike CDs and downloadable programs, this new method is more interactive (Terzi & Celik, 2005). The teacher and students can talk to each other in real-time (Alshahrani, 2016), they can even see each other through the Internet if the network bandwidth is sufficient. The breakout sessions, which is a communication technology available in virtual classes, allow participants to work collaboratively in a small group setting to accomplish a task while the teacher is engaged in private conversations with other students. In addition, because the classes are kept to a small number, the teacher will be able to give personal feedback.

Internet-based education is thought to be useful, especially in language classes, thanks to its potential to enhance communication. They can be used to help students interact with different people, facilitate knowledge acquisition, and increase motivation toward language learning (Lee et al., 2018). Thus, computers and, lately, Internet development has had a greater impact on the way teachers and students interact. Virtual instruction allows students who might normally be shy or feel intimidated in face-to-face classroom situations to find their voice through online activities

(Pritchard et al., 2010; Yu, 2017). It enables marginalized students to establish themselves as part of the classroom community (Palmer et al., 2008; Horwitz, 2013).

Among learners' differences that have been found to impact academic achievement, learners' personality traits were proved to be a crucial variable. Thus, it is vital to establish the role of personality in the context of online learning. Therefore, personality will be the focus of the following sub-section.

Personality Traits

Defining Personality Traits

The variable of "personality traits" represents a good illustration of what is meant by intrinsic factors. A review of the research on personality indicates that there is no consensus among researchers about a common definition for this fundamental concept. Phares (1991) defines it as "that pattern of characteristic thought, feeling, and behavior that distinguishes one person from another and persists over time and situation". In contrast, other researchers view this definition as concerned with general personality traits. Humphreys and Revelle (1984) do not view personality traits as absolute and predetermined behavior characteristics. For them, it is rather a question of disposition to behavior, and the interaction between person and situation should be taken into account when we want to conceptualize personality (Heinström, 2002).

The Big Five Personality Factors

In an attempt to elaborate a more accurate profile of personality traits, a consensus about five basic personality traits has emerged during the last few years. The five personality factors are extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. These five factors are seen as stable and directly related to behavior (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

1. **Extraversion:** This trait describes persons in terms of preferences, behavior, and social interaction. Extroverts tend to be more physically energetic, sociable, frank, and talkative. Introverts are quiet, reserved, and like to be alone.
2. **Agreeableness:** it describes persons in terms of interaction with others. Agreeable people tend to be altruistic, friendly, kind, and cooperative. The opposite group is hostile, aggressive, indifferent, and self-centered.
3. **Conscientiousness:** it describes people in terms of the will to achieve, i.e., how persistent people are in pursuing their goals. The conscientious tend to be methodical, competent, ordered, and dutiful. The flexible are impulsive, less organized, and more likely to be distracted from tasks.
4. **Neuroticism:** it is related to emotional stability. It describes people in terms of their tendency to experience negative thoughts and feelings, i.e., negative affectivity or nervousness. Anxious people tend to feel insecure, emotionally distressed, and worried. People with emotional stability tend to be more relaxed, calm, stable, and less prone to sadness.
5. **Openness to experience:** it describes people in terms of open-mindedness, intellect, and interest in culture. People with a high level of openness tend to be liberal, creative, and cultured. People with a low level of openness tend to be more down-to-earth and more practical.

Previous Studies on the effect of Personality on Online Learning Experience

While there is rich literature examining the relationship between personality traits and academic achievement in traditional learning contexts, only a few studies investigate the relationship between personality and online learning acceptance. Past research has ignored the role of personality as it seldom examined the effect of the latter variable and online learning acceptance. Hence, little is known about such a relationship.

As far as research on online learning is concerned, several research studies have examined

students' perceptions of online education (Fansury et al., 2020; Rinekso & Muslim, 2020; Elmouhtarim, 2012; Elshawis & Belshaikh, 2021; Annury et al., 2022; Parilla & Abadilla, 2022; Zulherman et al., 2023). However, research carried out to probe affective factors, namely personality traits, and demographic backgrounds, namely class level and gender, that affect students' acceptance of virtual learning is scarce. A lack of sufficient research attention has been given to affective variables and demographic backgrounds affecting students' acceptance of online education.

Since findings are limited in this field of research, further research is needed to better understand students' experience with online learning to establish variables that bolster online learning effectiveness. The proposed hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Students' personality traits correlate with online learning acceptance.

H2: Students' class level defines online learning acceptance.

H3: Gender correlates with online learning acceptance.

RESEARCH METHOD

The current survey is quasi-experimental and multivariate. First, it is described as quasi-experimental as it uses neither a control group nor a treatment or a pre-test (Thomas, 2022). Second, it is viewed as multivariate because it investigates how some independent variables (personality traits, class level, and gender) affect the research-dependent variable (online learning acceptance) (American Psychological Association, 2015). It aims to examine the impact of affective factors, namely personality traits, and demographic variables, namely class level and gender, on online learning acceptance in the Tunisian EFL formal university context setting.

Sampling

The sample considered in this research is a subset of the large population of Tunisian EFL university students. The research subjects have ages ranging from 19 to 28 and specialize in EFL at the Higher Institute of Applied Studies in Humanities of Gafsa (HIASHG). The participants selected for the current survey were 150 Tunisian university students at the HIASHG. Convenience sampling is adopted in this research (American Psychological Association, 2015). Then, the sample is composed of subjects who are simply available in a convenient way to the researcher. Such choice of sampling is motivated by the fact that it is practical. Table 1 gives detailed information about the distribution of the study's participants by gender and class level.

Table 1. The distribution of the study's participants by gender and class level

	Male	Female	Total		
Gender	50	100	150		
	1st year Students	2nd year Student	3rd year Student	Master Degree Students	Total
Class Level	60	40	35	15	150

Research Instrument and Procedures

In the current survey, a self-report questionnaire, which represents the most ubiquitous data collection procedure in IDR (Individual Difference Research) (McLeod, 2018), is used to gather data on students' personality traits in addition to their class level, gender, and acceptance of online learning.

The study instrument is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on eliciting students' personality traits. It includes items selected from the most prominent theory of personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The personality part consists of five components, which are extraversion,

agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience, and 10 sub-components.

The number of items per scale (or component) in this first part of the questionnaire was decided on concerning a compromise between reliability and validity. The validity issue includes the length of the questionnaire and the willingness of the respondent to complete trustfully and unwarily a long questionnaire. The reliability issue concerns the internal consistency of the questionnaire components, which is closely related to the number of items per component. This compromise has led to the decision to include an average number of four items per component. The first part, then, consists of 20 statements adapted from the Online Implementation of IPIP Five Factor Personality Inventory Version 1, 5th January 2001, Tom Buchanan, University of Westminster.

Likert scaling, which is the most widely used scaling format in questionnaire design (Mcleod, 2019), is used to rate the questionnaire's statements on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with a middle value labeled "neutral" or "undecided". The final score for a participant on a given sub-component of the questionnaire is the sum of her/his ratings for the items that compose it.

It is worth noting that in some sub-components, items that are reversed in meaning from the overall direction of the statement (i.e., negatively worded) have their answer value reversed before the calculation of the total. Therefore, if the respondent is rated 2, it becomes 4; 3=3; 4=2; and 5=1. That represents a guard against developing a response set, i.e., the tendency of participants to develop a consistent set of answers that do not faithfully reflect their behaviors. The second section of the questionnaire is composed of four items eliciting information about students' demographic information, namely class level, gender, and acceptance of online learning.

The reliability of the questionnaire used in this study was established using Internal Consistency Reliability (American Psychological Association, 2015). The reliability coefficient was calculated, and it was found to equal .72, which is highly satisfactory.

After establishing the reliability of the questionnaire, it was distributed hand to hand to the participants, who were asked to agree or disagree with the statements, which are in the form of declarative sentences, and to give information about their class level, gender, and acceptance of online learning.

Data Analysis

The present study is organized around a set of variables: students' personality traits, class level, gender, and acceptance of online learning. Relying on the relationship between the variables in question (American Psychological Association, 2015), acceptance of online learning is treated and labeled as a dependent variable. The other variables are treated as independent variables.

To fulfill the aims of the study, the data analysis procedures that have been relied on in the current survey are the following: "the Cronbach alpha index of internal consistency" and "the Spearman Rho Correlation". The former was employed in this study to assess the loading of the different items and the components of the questionnaire. The latter was employed to assess the relationship between the study variables (American Psychological Association, 2015).

The choice of the Spearman Rho correlation was supported by the following reasons: this kind of correlation has been widely used in IDR to explore the relationship between individual difference variables. In addition, this type of correlation requires ordinal data (American Psychological Association, 2015), as is the case in the present study, i.e., data on students' personality traits and students' acceptance of online learning are obtained based on the Likert scaling format as ordinal data.

The obtained data were computer processed using SPSS (Software Package for Social Sciences) for Windows, Standard version 11.0. In the process, each item of the questionnaire was given a code or label; then, the total of each group of items making up a single sub-component was computed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

150 subjects participated in the study. 140 subjects were finally retained for the study proper. 10 subjects were eliminated because their questionnaires contained missing values, i.e., they did not complete all the items. The findings are presented and discussed according to the three research questions posed in the study.

Learners' Personalities Traits and Online Learning Acceptance

Findings based on the relation between students' personality traits and online learning acceptance can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2. The correlation between students' language learning style preferences and app use

	Online Acceptance
Extraversion	.345**
Agreeableness	.487**
Conscientiousness	.544**
Neuroticism	-1
Openness to Experience	.623**

**Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

The first hypothesis about Question I (H1) presumes that students' personality traits significantly correlate with online learning acceptance. The correlation test (Table 2) lends much empirical support to this hypothesis. Hence, H1 is maintained. The obtained results revealed that all the personality traits were found to correlate significantly with online learning acceptance. Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience were proven to positively impact online learning acceptance. However, neuroticism was found to negatively influence it. Openness to experience is the most significant predictor of online learning acceptance as the two variables in question correlate at .62, followed by conscientiousness (.54), agreeableness (.48), and then extraversion (.34). In contrast, a perfect but negative correlation was registered between neuroticism and online learning acceptance (-1). Put differently, in the Tunisian EFL formal university setting, openness to experience represents the most prominent determinant of online learning acceptance, whereas neuroticism is the most significant obstacle to Internet-based learning acceptance. Thus, the present study empirically proved that students with different personality traits have different levels of virtual learning acceptance. Such a finding highlights the role played by personality in accounting for online learning acceptance.

Class Level and Online Learning Acceptance

The second hypothesis relating to Question II (H2) suggests a significant correlation between the class level and remote learning acceptance. H2 does not receive any empirical evidence as the correlation test is proved to be non-significant (Table 3). Hence, the second hypothesis is rejected. In other words, in the Tunisian EFL formal university context, the class level has no bearing on learners' online learning acceptance.

Table 3. The Correlation between Class Level, Gender, and Online Learning Acceptance

	Online Learning
Class Level	.152
Gender	.028

Gender and Online Learning Acceptance

The third hypothesis drawn from the third Question (H3) assumes that gender has a significant impact on students' acceptance of online learning. Quite unexpectedly, Table 3 shows that the results are not consonant with this hypothesis. After examining the relationship between students' gender and their online learning acceptance, the correlation test gives a non-significant correlation. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that in the Tunisian EFL formal university setting, there are no differences between male students and their female counterparts in their online learning acceptance.

According to the findings and the type of relationship with online learning acceptance, personality traits can be categorized as immediate factors. Openness to experience is the best indicator of online learning acceptance. Open-to-experience students are characterized as inventive, inquisitive, adventurous progressive, and willing to attain new knowledge. All these characteristics can explain the reason behind the high correlation between openness to experience and online learning acceptance. Such type of learners is eager to discover this innovative way of teaching. This study finding is consistent with [Schneider and Preckel \(2017\)](#) study.

Concerning conscientiousness, the fact that conscientious learners are described as responsible, self-disciplined, and organized urges them to assume their responsibilities. Fearing the loss of learning, they complied with the teaching policies adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, by being distinctive in their perseverance in pursuing their goals irrespective of how much effort they are going to expend or how much time they are going to devote, this category of learners will act responsibly and follow online courses. These learners focus only on attaining their objectives irrespective of the learning mode being used. This finding is in the same line as that of [Volodina et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Coenen et al. \(2021\)](#).

As far as agreeableness is concerned, agreeable learners are described as committed and cooperative. Also, they encourage tight ties and value the notion of community and belonging. This can explain their willingness to adopt the new modes of teaching, as the notions of community and cooperation are central to virtual learning. This finding is consonant with the results of [Volodina et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Coenen et al. \(2021\)](#) studies, but this contradicts that of [Meyer et al. \(2019\)](#).

In addition, in light of the study findings, extraversion was also recorded as a good determinant of online learning acceptance but at a lower rank. Such findings can be explained by the fact that extroverts are seen as easy-going and willing to be in the company of others. Hence, online learning will appeal to this type of student. Virtual education rests upon the notion of sharing and communicating. Thus, extroverts enjoy interacting with others, no matter whether the interaction is physical or virtual. This finding does not go in the same direction as that of [Volodina et al. \(2019\)](#), but it is in the same line as that of [Bahçekapılı and Karaman \(2020\)](#).

However, based on the study results, neuroticism has been found to negatively affect online learning acceptance. A possible justification for such a finding is that learners with high levels of neuroticism tend to feel frustrated and anxious about unfamiliar situations. Neurotic students are unwilling to adopt the new method of teaching (i.e., online education) as it is unprecedented, unfamiliar to them, and not trusting. This finding is consistent with what [Bhagat et al. \(2019\)](#) study has found.

Concerning the implications drawn from the study results, decision-makers in Tunisia should develop an efficient environment for remote learning. In a practical sense, all EFL university

teachers should be encouraged to use this innovative way of teaching when delivering their courses. In that way, neurotic students will be familiarized with online learning. Virtual EFL classes can be used as supplementary tools. Virtual curriculums can complement the curriculum taught in the traditional education setting. Online courses can be used in addition to regular class sessions but not to replace the latter, as they show positive results when they are used to enhance EFL learning (Warschauer, 2006). In this hybrid blended course delivery (i.e., a combination of online and face-to-face learning), two distinct classroom communities will exist side by side: the community of face-to-face interaction and the online one, both with their social dynamics and interaction. Thus, students are provided with the opportunity to engage in both mediums.

However, implementing virtual EFL classes has not been easy for EFL teachers. Most EFL teachers in Tunisia are unfamiliar with computer technology instruction. Some EFL teachers feel nervous, uneasy, and worried about their insufficiency in professional knowledge and skills. Such a feeling can make them unready to shift their traditional educational paradigms to the more collaborative and student-centered paradigms needed in online education. Then, the problem is often that EFL teachers do not possess the necessary pedagogical and computer technological knowledge. To overcome this difficulty, EFL teachers should have ICT (Instructional Computer Technology) training. Based on the premise that teachers are the key agents of change and that they have a primary role in determining what would work best with students, teacher training programs should provide teachers with pedagogical and computer-technological experiences to successfully implement virtual EFL courses. Therefore, teacher-training programs represent one of the aspects that the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research needs to consider to implement Internet-based instruction in Tunisian universities successfully.

These courses should aim at enabling teachers to explore, build, and use different types of Internet-based communities in their teaching practice. This entails providing teachers with professionally developed experiences that enable them to make decisions, design courses, and create online learning environments for students. Teachers' expertise in the ICTs tools they have available is of paramount importance. They need the expertise to feel confident. Thus, teacher-training programs are expected to create opportunities for teachers to learn to integrate online courses into their curriculum. Relevant teacher training becomes thus imperative in the creation of opportunities to improve the use of virtual courses for communication and learning.

Since the use of technology has to be driven by pedagogy (Hwu, 2009) when providing EFL teachers with such training, the following considerations should be taken into account:

1. Emphasizing applications rather than theoretical accounts of how to use online courses.
2. Broadening awareness of a wide range of online education resources.
3. Presenting virtual courses as a tool for lifelong learning for both instructors and students.
4. Providing teachers with sufficient instructional technology background training to enable them to successfully implement online education.
5. It is admitted that providing such training programs is very costly; hence, the educational budget allotted should be raised.

Indeed, new technologies initially support, then extend and finally transform pedagogy as teachers gradually find out what the technology can do.

The prerequisite of virtual learning implementation is that teachers should be computer literate, be accustomed to the techniques of online education, and be able to apply this knowledge to their educational contexts. To be able to take this challenge (i.e., implement online courses), there should be sustained professional support in each university. This sustained professional support aims to reconstruct knowledge of ICTs, consolidate belief in action, and reduce menaces or

difficulties. Such aims can be reached by arranging workshops and seminars, having frequent dialogues with EFL teachers about online teaching problems, issues, and solutions, and inviting teachers for classroom observations and idea exchange. Indeed, by offering online teaching training for EFL teachers and providing sustained professional support plus continued curriculum modifications, the Ministry of Higher Education can make online teaching implementation a success in the Tunisian EFL context.

To sum up, this lack of adaptation and innovation in the Tunisian EFL university context can best be overcome by changing:

1. The philosophies of language and language teaching and learning.
2. The curriculum orientation and the perceived role of the instructor and the student in the learning environment.
3. The instructional designs for classroom practices should stop supporting a top-down learning environment.

If this is done, online education can take place in the EFL curriculum, and hence it can foster learning. More importantly, the main emphasis needs to rest on the appropriateness of the pedagogy, not the use of the technology per se. Furthermore, such guidelines are aimed at creating the optimal conditions whereby EFL online learning is instigated, enhanced, sustained, and become more inclusive to all personality types.

CONCLUSIONS

This study is conducted within the field of psycholinguistics to investigate the linkage between personality traits, class level, gender, and learners' acceptance of online learning in the Tunisian EFL formal university setting. Thus the study considers the role of affective variables: namely personality traits and learners' demographic backgrounds: namely class level, and gender, in remote learning acceptance. The present survey postulates that focusing on learners' variables deepens our understanding of variable levels of online learning acceptance and hence online course success.

The most important findings of the current study are: first, clear and ample empirical evidence was established for the claim of the relevance of considering affective variables to grasp the full picture of EFL online course acceptance. Second, in the Tunisian EFL formal university context, openness to experience was detected to be the most significant predictor of online learning acceptance. In contrast, neuroticism represents the most inhibiting factor for such acceptance. Third, class level and gender were found to have no direct bearing on online learning acceptance, as the two hypotheses concerning the relationship between class level, gender, and online learning acceptance were proved null. Hence, the conclusion that can be drawn from this study is their personality types account for that variation in learners' acceptance of online learning.

Then, the study reveals that all personality traits except neuroticism significantly and positively correlate with online learning acceptance. Neuroticism proved to be a strong inhibiting factor for virtual learning acceptance. Such a fact poses a major challenge in reducing the frustration level of neurotic students to make the innovative way of teaching appeal to this type of learner. The latter should be helped to feel secure when adopting virtual learning modes. To minimize the negative impact of neuroticism, it is vital to digitalize the learning process. Such a step is recommended in order not to leave neurotic learners behind. Instead, they should be supported to view such teaching modes as reliable and can adjust to them.

The study contributes to enhancing EFL online learning by directing policymakers and academics to develop appropriate methods and approaches in EFL online teaching. It establishes empirical evidence for the relevance of incorporating learners' affective variables, namely

personality traits, in determining EFL online learning acceptance. In light of the study findings, practical guidelines have been proposed for policymakers and EFL teachers to enhance online learning acceptance by EFL university students.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

What can be noted as far as the future avenues of research on online learning in the Tunisian EFL university setting are that the field is needed from now on is not assessing students' perceptions of online learning. Instead, the bar should be set high and go beyond such assessment towards probing into factors impacting EFL online course success. Such a research line can provide valuable information to fill the gap in the literature about factors influencing EFL online learning effectiveness in the Tunisian context. Little research has been published about the Tunisian EFL online learning context, which outlines the grave need for further investigating this field. This study represents a potential point of reference in EFL online literature as it establishes grounds for further research in the Tunisian EFL online learning context.

The present study has two potential limitations. The first one deals with the sample. Only 150 university students fill in the study questionnaire. The sample in question is not an accurate representation of all EFL university students in Tunisia. Thus, the generalization of its findings cannot be warranted. Despite the challenge it represents, it would be of vital importance that future studies should involve a larger sample of Tunisian EFL university students from other universities. The second limitation has to do with the data collection tool. Although the data gathered from the self-report questionnaire on personality traits are found to be reliable, a triangular approach to assess learners' personality traits is recommended to investigate the variable in question in greater depth.

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