



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

### **The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Students' Learning Behavior (the Case of Master 1 EFL Students- University of Saida – Algeria)**

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The current study investigates the impact of COVID-19 epidemic on the learning behavior of Master1 EFL students –University of Saida - Algeria. To fulfill the study's objectives, a mixed method approach encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methods was used to compile, analyze and interpret data. Two research tools, a questionnaire and an interview were delivered to the students and teachers respectively at the Department of English – University of Saida - Algeria. In the light of the obtained results, students were reported to hold negative attitudes towards COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a lot of psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, and lack of motivation. From a cognitive perspective, the study revealed that the negative impact of the pandemic is related to students' cognitive learning styles such as the challenges that EFL field-dependent learners face when studying online. Conversely, COVID-19 outbreak had a positive cognitive influence on field-independent learners in relation to online learning.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Virtual Learning, Field-Dependent Learners, Field-Independent Learners.

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### **Introduction**

With the outbreak of Covid 19 pandemic, alternative methods as well as tools are provided by the minister of higher education for both the teachers and the students of the main setting to accomplish and optimize the pedagogical process. Different studies, however, claim that the real issue resides in the psychological and cognitive effects of viral aftereffects on learning behavior in relation to the implementation of distance learning techniques among students.

The present study primarily aims at investigating the psychological, and cognitive impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on Master 1 EFL students' learning behavior covering issues like lack of motivation, anxiety, depression, as well as the challenges that field-independent and field-dependent learners encounter in relation to online learning.

### **Theoretical Review:**

The present section covers a review of the main literature related to the research problematic. Different relevant variables like students' affective side, motivation and anxiety during the pandemic, field-dependence/independence variations and cognition are delineated within the COVID 19 pandemic context.

### **Learners' Affective Dimension and Implications to Learning during the Pandemic:**

University students' psychological health gets frightfully devastated due to the challenges evoked by covid-19 pandemic including lack of motivation, prevalence of both anxiety and depression which arise owing to the individuals' health concerns and worries.

#### ***Students' Motivation during the Pandemic:***

For students all over the world, the move to online learning has been difficult. Many of them have reported a lack of interest, as a result of the new class style, which could influence their academic performance throughout the learning process. This kind of change caused a sense of amotivation among learners, i.e. a state of being non motivated resulting hindrances in learning activities involvement, as well as losing interest in appreciating the importance of tasks and academic outcomes. The term amotivation was firstly mentioned in the theory of SD (self-determination) as a lack of a desire to perform when a person is unmotivated, their action lacks purpose and a feeling of personal causality. It is mainly caused by a lack of appreciation for an activity (Ryan, 1995), a lack of confidence in one's ability to perform it (Deci, 1975), or a lack of belief that it will result in the intended outcome (Seligman, 1975). In 2016, it was also defined by Harnet as low self-efficacy in learning engagement due to a lack of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which manifests as a feeling of reluctance. In other words, a sense of failure stemming from the lack of priority placed on completing duties, which leads to low academic performance.

#### ***Students' anxiety during the pandemic:***

Lockdowns during Covid-19 outbreak force students to study at home through platforms to guarantee their safety, but it appears that this results anxiety among them. Social connection is crucial for students, and its absence has a negative influence on them, particularly on their mental and emotional well-being (Nasir,

2020). Therefore, social isolation induced by the pandemic causes significant challenges for individuals during quarantine, such as changes in their daily living routines and interactions, which affect their psychological well-being (Chatterjee et al; Druss 2020; Salari et al, 2020). Unfortunately, the aftermaths of Covid-19 outbreak results a sense of anxiety among learners owing to social isolation, health risks, and the changeover to virtual education style (Tian et al, 2020).

Anxiety during the pandemic can also be linked to academic pressure for example E-learning. Students are required to complete a plethora of course assignments in order to achieve the wanted academic competencies. The course assignments can range in difficulty from easy to highly difficult. Coursework completion adaptation can deteriorate over time as students become bored and hopeless. Especially, when they find it challenging to understand the E-courses posted in the platforms so as to resolve the tasks being sent by the teacher online. To put it in another way, college students are expected to complete a large number of course assignments in a short amount of time (Sirin, 2011).

#### ***Students' depression during the pandemic:***

During the viral outreaching, university students are greatly impacted by depression, a psychiatric condition that develops as a result of social isolation, boredom, loneliness, and repetitive negative thoughts. Governmental restraints such as lockdowns, social distancing, and lack of interaction as a means of limiting virus propagation cause a variety of psychological difficulties at the level of mental health, such as depression (Holmes et al, 2020; Yao et al, 2020). From the beginning of the pandemic, this psychological condition spreads all across the world in an intensive and rapid manner (Bäuerle et al, 2020; Fullana et al, 2020; Huang & Zhao, 2020; Salari et al, 2020). During the pandemic phase, several obstacles that impede the process of learning arise, such as university closures, restricted access to mental health treatments, diminished independence, delayed graduation, and loss of research, career, and internship prospects. All of these play a role in worsening students' psychological well-being (Aucejo et al, 2020; Gruber et al, 2020; Seidel et al, 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). As a consequence, various mental health issues have an impact on students' learning behavior during this process, and one of these implications is depression (Douglas et al, 2020). This might be related to a lack of emotional resilience and social contact, as well as loneliness, which is a provocative risk factor for depression (Elmer et al, 2020; Zimmerman et al, 2020).

#### ***Learners' Cognitive Styles and Implication to learning during the pandemic:***

Covid-19 pandemic affects university students differently because each student perceives information in his or her own unique way, which is why learners are classified as dependent or independent regarding their learning styles. Some students rely on the teacher, while others can depend heavily on themselves.

#### ***Field-dependence and field-independence as cognitive variables:***

Broadly defined, field-dependence/independence refers to the way people perceive and memorize information (Capelle, 1995). In more sophisticated terms, Brown (1987) states that:

*“field independence is the ability to perceive a particular relevant item or factor in a field of distracting items. Field dependence is, conversely, the tendency to be*

*dependent on the total field such that the parts embedded within the field are not easily perceived, though that total field is perceived more clearly as a unified whole*" (Brown, 1987, 85).

Field independent (left-brained) individuals, unlike field dependent ones are reported to be of an analytical tendency, having the ability to separate individual items from their visual background. Field dependent individuals have a rather more global perception of the world (Meara & Skehan, 1989).

From an affective parameter, field independent individuals tend to be more isolated, impersonal, competitive and less sensitive. They are usually described as introverted individuals.

However, field dependent persons are more gregarious, outgoing, sensitive to other people and quite empathic. In fact, researchers prefer to call such individuals "field sensitive" rather than "field dependent".

From a research point of view, the construct *field independence* /field dependence might have certain implications on language learning.

Naiman (1975) in Meara, P., & Skehan, P. (1989) asserted that there is a positive relationship between field independence and classroom activities which require drills, analysis and attention to details. Hansen and Stansfield (1981) in Meara, P., & Skehan, P. (1989) also indicated that students with a field independent style may perform better in cloze testing which demands analytical abilities. Furthermore, Abraham (1985) in Meara, P., & Skehan, P. (1989) found that there is a positive correlation between field independence and deductive lessons in the language classroom.

On the other hand, view to the fact that field dependent individuals incline to interpersonal situations and verbal interaction with people, field dependence is believed to relate to the subconscious acquisition of the oral communicative skills.

Brown (1977) states that: "*the field dependent person, with his empathy and social outreach, will be a more effective and motivated communicator*" (Brown, 1977 in Krashen, 1988, 77). On the same line of thought, Skehan (1989) in Meara, P., & Skehan, P. (1989) suggests that there is a significant relationship between field dependence and language learning success. This is because, according to Skehan, a field dependent style determines greater communicative competence, greater conversational resourcefulness and greater negotiation skills, all of which are relevant factors to language development.

Research in language learning and teaching states that it would be inappropriate to say that one style is more important than the other. In fact, in language learning both styles are equally needed. Brown (1987) notes that there are two different kinds of language learning: the first is *natural language learning*. It requires a natural face-to-face communication.

The second kind is *classroom language learning*. It encompasses the traditional analytic, paper-and-pencil activities, drills, exercises and tests. Natural language learning, according to Brown (1987) works better with a field-dependent style, whereas classroom language learning requires a field-independent style.

It is noteworthy, however, to mention Kang's (1999) suggestion stating that tailoring teaching strategies according to students' learning styles would have a

positive effect on their learning achievement. Kang (1999) points out that language teachers should be aware of their students' preferences in order to be able to help them learn more effectively. Therefore, classroom opportunities should be balanced for both analytical and global learners by varying teaching methods and by implementing a careful selection of classroom activities.

***Field dependent learners and Implication to learning during the pandemic:***

Dependent learners may encounter difficulties while getting involved in distance education during the pandemic because its main characteristics are social isolation, personal autonomy, constrained orientation, and limited interpersonal interaction between students and instructors (Stein, 1960; Thompson, 1984, Wedemeyer & Childs, 1961; Wedemeyer, 1971; Woolsey, 1974). Issues have been raised about the opportunities and quality of interaction provided by online platforms between instructors and students who used to work in peers (Roblyer & Ekhaml, 2000; Howland & Moore, 2002; Petride, 2002; Vonderwell, 2003). So, dependent students' learning process is hindered because the environment and social settings are the main factors that influence the development of dependent learning (Pithers, 2002). Moreover, person - to - person social connection and interaction are also lacking in online learning, which prevents students to take advantage of learning with one another (Vonderwell, 2003; Sit et al, 2005).

***Field-independent Learners and Implication to Learning during the Pandemic***

Nevertheless, It has been found that online courses are beneficial to students who prefer self-directed learning (You & Kang, 2014). Individuals who are able to self-regulate their learning often utilized various methods to improve their performance. They do not seek help from peers or professors, and they had the ability of metacognition in order to reflect on their own learning (You & Kang, 2014). It should be noted that self-regulation and intrinsic motivation are important factors in ensuring a successful online course experience (Matuga, 2009). Self-regulation is the ability of students to plan and monitor their own behavior. However, it is not enough to succeed in the academic realm, students must also be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to use their own strategies in order to succeed in online learning (Matuga, 2009). For individuals who are field independent, online learning is thought to be a better method of learning. They usually have excellent organizational skills and can easily access and organize information. In their study, Chen and Ford (2000a) explained that the levels of independency greatly affect the ways people organize and prioritize information. In contrast, field-dependent learners tend to be more prone to making mistakes and exhibiting poor organizational skills; they may be less successful in learning in various online environments (Chen & Ford, 2000b). They may be less successful in learning in various online environments. Other studies also suggest that students who take advantage of distance education are likely to have a higher level of autonomy and control over their learning. They also tend to require less structure and interaction with their classmates as well as their instructor (Diaz & Cartnal, 1999; Flinck, 1979; Glatter & Wedell, 1971; Miller, 1995; Miller & Honeyman, 1993; Pascal, 1973; Thompson & Knox, 1987).

### **Methodology and research tools:**

This research work is devoted to discuss the influence of COVID-19 outbreak on M1 English students' behavior during the learning process at Saida University. So, it is essential to shed light on how the aftermaths of the pandemic affect the psychological state of being, as well as, the cognitive functioning of university students. The present study analyses the data obtained from both students and teachers at the Department of English – University of Saida – Algeria.

The research questions set in this paper are as follows:

1-What kind of effect does COVID-19 pandemic cause at the level of students' psychological side?

2-What is the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the cognitive functioning of both field- dependent and field-independent students?

The hypotheses formulated are as follows:

1- The students experience a deplorable atmosphere full of anxiety, depression, and lack of motivation during Covid-19 pandemic.

2-As a result of the viral crisis, field-dependent and field-independent students are facing a significant retreat in their cognitive functioning.

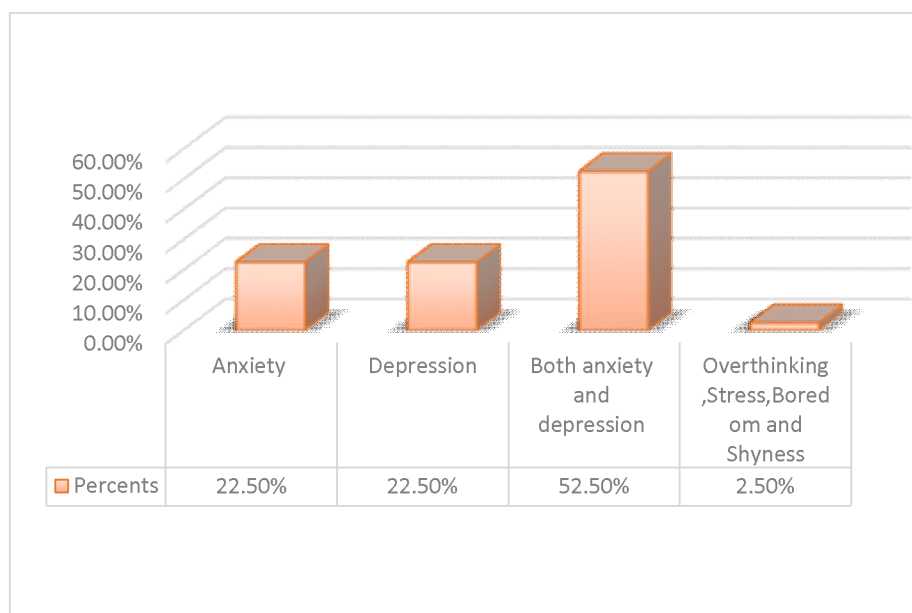
In order to answer the research questions that either validate or reject the assumptions, the current study implements both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed method) on a corpus of 40 Master1 English students and 5 teachers. The former is used to explain the EFL students' insights and perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on their cognitive and psychological sides throughout their questionnaire responses, which will be described as statistical variables. Furthermore, an anonymous semi-structured interview was designed for EFL teachers because their responses help in gathering available information about the influence of the pandemic on students' learning behavior, as well as collecting necessary data for any future research.

### **Questionnaires and Interviews: Results and Interpretation:**

The present part covers the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from the students' questionnaire and the teacher's interview.

#### ***Students' questionnaire:***

The main objective of the students' questionnaire is to identify the psychological and cognitive impacts of COVID-19 pandemic based on the standpoints of learners. Results of the main sections show that students who experience anxiety represent the same number as the ones who face depression during the pandemic in which they form 45% out of the whole percentage which means 22.5% for each one of them. However, it appears that students who are both anxious and depressed at the same time are quite numbered comparing to the others in which they embody 52.5% among 40 participants. In addition to the minority of learners 2.5% who do not undergo any of the aforementioned psychological inhibitions but they experience over thinking, stress, boredom, and shyness. The aforesaid statistics are depicted in the bar graph below:



**Figure 1: Students' Psychological Inhibitions during the Pandemic teachers' interview:**

As mentioned earlier, 5 EFL teachers participated in the study as data providers. Nine (9) questions were addressed to them in an interview in order to elicit their personal opinions on the psychological and cognitive impact of the covid-19 pandemic on students' learning behavior. The answers differ from one teacher to another. Three (3) teachers out of five agree that E-learning has a negative impact on field-dependent students because they need the teacher to guide them and shed light on many things, they are also extrinsically motivated extroverts who prefer to learn in a collaborative work environment.

Consequently field-dependent learners consider online learning as an obstacle. Field-independent learners, on the other hand, benefit from E-learning since they enjoy research and are intrinsically motivated introverts who prefer working alone as well as they are self-reliant, analytical learners. Another instructor believes that online learning has a negative impact on both types of learners because they are less interested to get access to the platform for studying. Furthermore, the last educator contends that virtual learning has no impact on these types of students as the platform is simply a website where teachers post only lectures.

#### **Main findings:**

After examining the conclusions and findings of both research instruments, namely students' questionnaire and instructors' interview, the researchers attempted to interpret and scrutinize the responses of both tutors and learners in order to ascertain plausible answers to the research questions posed and to verify the hypotheses proposed at the beginning of the study.



The prevailing results demonstrate that, on the one hand, the pandemic has a psychological impact on students in terms of lack of motivation, anxiety, depression, and, on the other hand, it has a negative cognitive impact on field-dependent learners' cognitive functioning. However, this outbreak has a positive effect on field-independent learners' intellectual academic performance.

#### **Recommendations and Suggestions:**

On the light of the research findings, the present section aims to give some suggestions and recommendations for both instructors and EFL learners to appropriately manage and mitigate the affective and cognitive influences of covid-19 on the university setting.

#### **Ensuring support by teachers**

The position and expertise of teachers are irreplaceable, and their regular interaction with students places them among the most significant agents of educational change. Furthermore, teachers and school leaders are the most likely to be connected to students' families and may play a significant role in both reaching the most vulnerable students and keeping their families interested in their education. They are key players in the COVID-19 dilemma, helping their students through the escalation of online distant learning.

#### **Encouraging EFL students to participate in wellness programs**

During the pandemic, university students experienced a variety of psychological issues; therefore, there is a need for balanced programming that supports learning while also helping their social, emotional, and cognitive adjustment, including preventive care. This can be achieved through prioritizing stress reduction, mental and physical wellness routines such as daily chances for motion, yoga, mindfulness activities, meditation, and any extra relaxing routines to support self-regulation (e.g., lights off, music, breathing, sketching, sport, etc).

#### **Encouraging students to learn about self-regulated multi-dimensional felt experiences**

Individuals can learn to manage their emotions by participating in a feel-based, person-centered intervention (Arcand, Durand-Bush & Miall, 2007; Callary & Durand-Bush, 2008; Doell, Durand-Bush & Newburg, 2006; Lussier-Ley & Durand-Bush, 2009). The Resonance Performance Model (RPM; Callary & Durand-Bush, 2008), developed by Newburg et al (2002), illustrates resonance as a dynamic and interactive process by which individuals manage their felt experiences to enhance performance and well-being. As a self-regulation process, it emphasizes people's efforts to change their inner states or reactions in order to conform to accepted norms (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004). It leads individuals to become consciously aware of the disparities between their existing and intended self-states, and then to deliberately choose to participate in measures to lessen these disparities (Carver and Scheier, 1981). Individuals who experience resonance, referring to Vohs and Baumeister (2004), have the ability to preserve harmony between their inner self and their social and physical world. The RPM is made up of four parts: the way you want to feel, preparation, hurdles, and revisiting the way you want to feel. Table 1 briefly outlines the RPM's components.



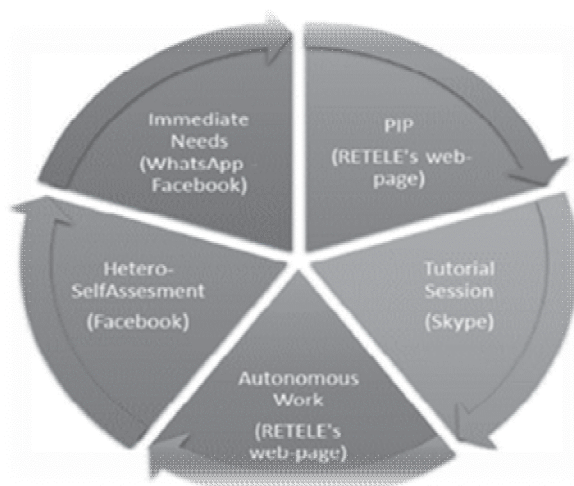
*Table 1.* Components of the Resonance Performance Model (Simon & Durand-Bush, 2009, adapted from Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002)

Component	Description
The Way You Want to Feel	Refers to the way individuals want to feel in important areas of life from different relevant perspectives (e.g., physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially, and spiritually).
Preparation	Refers to what allows individuals to feel the way they want while achieving their performance goals. It can include, but is not limited to, cognitive, physical, technical, tactical, emotional, social, or organizational means, strategies, or activities.
Obstacles	Obstacles are both internal (e.g., negative thought) and external (e.g., parental pressure) barriers that prevent individuals from feeling the way they want.
Revisit the Way You Want to Feel	Refers to what allows individuals to reconnect with the way they want to feel after facing an obstacle. It can include, but is not limited to, cognitive, physical, technical, tactical, emotional, social or organizational means, strategies, or activities.

**Table 1: Components of the resonance performance model (adapted from Newburg et al, (2002: internet page).**

#### **Enhancing EFL Learners' Independent Learning through Promoting New Skills and Competencies**

It is worth noting that EFL instructors are invited to teach field-dependent students the fundamentals of becoming field-independent students, so that they may rely on themselves to study online during the Covid-19 epidemic. Furthermore, a variety of models and strategies are used to encourage student self-reliance, such as the peer-tutoring virtual model established by Herrera-Bohórquez, Largo-Rodriguez, and Viáfara-González (2019), which diminishes asymmetric relationships among the actors. It allows going beyond the academic realm and helping learners grow in other realms (metacognitive, emotional, affective, motivational, and professional). The following figure illustrates the core of the aforementioned model:



**Figure 2: Online peer-tutoring model**  
(Viáfara & Ariza, 2008, 20)

Simply said, and as it is illustrated in figure 2, it is an approach that helps learners because of its collaborative character, which allows "a more capable other" to collaborate with learners, scaffolding and amplifying learning chances.

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**بررسی تأثیر همه‌گیری کووید ۱۹ بر رفتار یادگیری دانشجویان**  
(مورد مطالعه: دانشجویان کارشناسی ارشد ۱ آموزش زبان انگلیسی - دانشگاه سعیده - الجزایر)

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این مطالعه به بررسی تأثیر همه‌گیری کووید-۱۹ بر رفتار یادگیری دانشجویان کارشناسی ارشد ۱ آموزش زبان انگلیسی در دانشگاه سعیده - الجزایر می‌پردازد. برای دستیابی به اهداف مطالعه، از یک روش ترکیبی شامل هر دو روش کمی و کیفی برای جمع‌آوری، تحلیل و تفسیر داده‌ها استفاده شد. دو ابزار پژوهشی، پرسشنامه و مصاحبه، به ترتیب بین دانشجویان و اساتید گروه زبان انگلیسی دانشگاه سعیده - الجزایر توزیع شد. در پرتو نتایج به‌دست‌آمده، مشخص شد که دانشجویان نگرش منفی نسبت به همه‌گیری کووید-۱۹ دارند که منجر به مشکلات روانی متعددی مانند اضطراب، افسردگی و عدم انگیزه شده است. از منظر شناختی، مطالعه نشان داد که تأثیر منفی همه‌گیری مرتبط با سبک‌های یادگیری شناختی دانشجویان است، مانند چالش‌هایی که یادگیرندگان وابسته به زمینه در آموزش آنلاین با آن مواجه می‌شوند. در مقابل، شیوع کووید-۱۹ تأثیر شناختی مثبتی بر یادگیرندگان مستقل از زمینه در رابطه با یادگیری آنلاین داشت.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** کووید-۱۹، یادگیری مجازی، یادگیرندگان وابسته به زمینه، یادگیرندگان مستقل از زمینه.

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