

English Language Teachers' Perceptions of Job Satisfaction in Online Contexts: A Study of Demands and Resources

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[10.22080/iselt.2026.31771.1193](https://doi.org/10.22080/iselt.2026.31771.1193)

Received

May 15, 2026

Accepted

July 17, 2026

Available online

July 26, 2026

Keywords:

Online Education,
Perceptions,
Qualitative Research,
EFL Teachers,
Teacher Job
Satisfaction.

Abstract

As online English language teaching (ELT) continues to expand globally, understanding the factors that influence teachers' job satisfaction in digital environments remains an essential yet underexplored area. Despite the increasing reliance on online platforms, much of the existing research has primarily focused on traditional classroom settings, leaving a significant gap in insights related to online language educators' perceptions. This study addresses this gap by exploring the key factors that impact job satisfaction among online English teachers, with an emphasis on technological, contextual, and interpersonal dimensions. Employing a qualitative research design, eight English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) educators from diverse regions of Iran were purposively selected and interviewed using semi-structured protocols. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: resource availability (e.g., technological support, autonomy), job demands (e.g., technical difficulties, workload), and relational aspects (e.g., student engagement, communication). Findings indicated that while teachers believed that resources and autonomy positively influenced satisfaction, technological challenges and increased demands could diminish teachers' motivation and well-being. The study highlights the importance of providing adequate technological support, fostering a supportive online environment, and recognizing teachers' autonomy to enhance job satisfaction. Implications for policymakers, educational institutions, and professional development programs include implementing targeted strategies to optimize online teaching conditions, thereby promoting teacher retention, improving instructional quality, and ultimately enriching student learning experiences in digital contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is a critical construct in occupational studies and is widely acknowledged as a key indicator of employees' attitudes toward their work (Spector, 2022). Originating in the late 1920s, research on job satisfaction has explored various industries and roles, identifying how job

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conditions impact worker motivation, well-being, and productivity. In education, teacher job satisfaction is particularly important because it influences instructional quality, teacher retention, and ultimately, student outcomes ([Admiraal, 2025](#); [Collie et al., 2012](#)). Given that educators face diverse working conditions, their subjective perceptions of job satisfaction provide valuable insights into the factors that enhance or impede their professional experiences.

The rapid expansion of online education, particularly in English language teaching (ELT), introduces new contexts for studying job satisfaction. Despite growing reliance on digital platforms worldwide, much of the existing research remains focused on traditional, face-to-face classrooms. This leaves a significant gap in understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by online language teachers. Online teaching environments merge technological, interpersonal, and contextual factors that differ markedly from conventional settings, thereby affecting teachers' job satisfaction in distinctive ways.

This study aims to investigate English language teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction specifically in online contexts. Understanding these perceptions is imperative because teachers' subjective experiences directly impact their motivation, well-being, and professional behavior, which shape teaching quality and student success ([Admiraal, 2025](#); [Roch & Montague, 2021](#); [Toropova et al., 2021](#)). Examining perceptions rather than broader quantitative measures allows for a nuanced exploration of how educators interpret and make sense of their resources, demands, and relationships within digital classrooms.

Online English language teaching presents emerging demands and resources that standard job satisfaction instruments may not capture adequately. For instance, factors such as technological efficacy, feelings of autonomy, flexibility, and modes of online communication carry particular salience in digital teaching environments. As online ELT is a relatively new and rapidly evolving field, qualitative research focusing on teachers' subjective viewpoints fills an important gap in the current literature. These insights help develop tailored professional support and policies that align with teachers' actual needs.

Teacher job satisfaction has been established as a complex construct influenced by multiple factors. Research across various educational contexts consistently highlights the significance of working conditions, professional support, and workload as determinants of satisfaction ([Admiraal, 2025](#); [Roch & Montague, 2021](#); [Toropova et al., 2021](#)). Specific contributors include access to sufficient resources, opportunities for professional development, collegial collaboration, leadership support, and manageable responsibilities. Psychological variables such as self-efficacy and perceived autonomy also mediate satisfaction by fostering engagement and resilience ([Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009](#); [Sun & Luo, 2024](#); [Wang et al., 2020](#)).

In online teaching, unique challenges complicate job satisfaction. Technical difficulties, limited social interaction, and the need for increased digital literacy can hinder educators' effectiveness and reduce motivation ([Stickney et al., 2019](#); [Sun & Luo, 2024](#)). Conversely, the flexibility afforded by online modalities, broader access to diverse students, and potential for improved work-life balance serve as motivating factors ([Marasi et al., 2020](#); [Stickney et al., 2019](#)). Self-efficacy, which refers to teachers' beliefs in their capability to manage online teaching demands, emerges as a critical psychological resource impacting satisfaction ([Sun & Luo, 2024](#)).

Despite these developments, research specifically targeting online English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teachers' job satisfaction is limited. Language teaching often requires highly interactive environments to engage learners effectively, which may be disrupted or transformed in digital formats ([Xu & Buckingham, 2024](#)). Current evidence suggests teacher readiness including technological proficiency and pedagogical adaptation is vital for fostering positive online teaching

experiences (Lim, 2023). However, investigations remain scarce, especially qualitative studies that explore teachers' perspectives in depth.

This study thus employs a qualitative methodology to explore how online EFL teachers perceive the factors influencing their job satisfaction. The research question guiding this inquiry is: How do online EFL teachers perceive factors influencing their job satisfaction? By focusing on teachers' lived experiences and interpretations, the study aims to uncover the contextual, interpersonal, and technological factors shaping satisfaction in online English teaching.

The theoretical framework used is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model introduced by Demerouti et al. (2001). The JD-R model provides a comprehensive approach to understanding workplace stress and motivation by categorizing job characteristics into demands and resources. Job demands refer to aspects of the role requiring physical or psychological effort that may cause strain and burnout, such as workload or role conflict (Crawford et al., 2010). Job resources, in contrast, are supportive elements that facilitate goal achievement, personal growth, and mitigate the negative effects of demands. These can include pay, social support, autonomy, and opportunities for development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The JD-R model has been effectively applied to teaching contexts, illustrating how resources enhance motivation and job satisfaction, while demands may detract from well-being (Han et al., 2020). Moreover, personal resources like resilience and perceived competence influence teachers' ability to cope with job demands and contribute positively to satisfaction and engagement (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). This study adapts the JD-R lens to the specific context of online English teaching, aiming to map out teachers' perceptions of demands and resources within digital environments.

To capture teachers' authentic views, this qualitative study utilizes purposive sampling of eight online EFL instructors from diverse regions in Iran, all holding TEFL degrees and with at least three years of online teaching experience. Semi-structured interviews enabled in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences related to autonomy, workload, technological support, student interactions, and professional challenges, among others.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Job Satisfaction: Importance and Key Influencing Factors

Recent research increasingly highlights teacher job satisfaction as both a predictor and an outcome in various educational contexts, from special education to higher education (Admiraal, 2025). Teachers' perceptions of their work environment significantly affect their well-being and motivation (Collie et al., 2012). Numerous studies establish a positive relationship between working conditions and job satisfaction, noting factors such as sufficient resources, collegial collaboration, professional development, leadership support, and manageable workloads as key contributors (Admiraal, 2025; Roch & Montague, 2021; Toropova et al., 2021).

For example, Rezaee et al. (2018) studied English teachers in Iran and confirmed a positive correlation between job satisfaction and performance, influenced by factors like adequate pay, working conditions, promotion opportunities, and supervision. However, qualitative data revealed significant dissatisfaction among Iranian teachers, negatively impacting their performance. In contrast, Qasserras (2024) found Moroccan English teachers in Vietnam reported high job satisfaction, citing professional development opportunities, favorable working conditions, and administrative support as key factors. Similarly, Toropova et al. (2021) explored Swedish teachers' job satisfaction, finding that cooperation, workload, and student discipline perceptions were strongly associated with satisfaction.

Cirocki et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of working conditions in their study of Indonesian secondary school English teachers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. They identified professional development, working conditions, colleague support, and pay as significant factors influencing job satisfaction. Collaboration and social support among teachers are also linked to higher satisfaction (McJames et al., 2025), though experiences can vary. Some teachers perceive collaboration as having minimal impact on their satisfaction (Lopes & Oliveira, 2020).

Teacher-learner relationships are another significant source of job satisfaction (Admiraal et al., 2019; Lopes & Oliveira, 2020). The quality of these relationships is closely linked to satisfaction levels (Harrison et al., 2023). Efforts to enhance job satisfaction should focus on improving classroom environments and fostering positive teacher-student relationships (Lopes & Oliveira, 2020). Teachers should actively work to build these relationships rather than assuming they will naturally develop.

Wang et al. (2020) highlighted learner characteristics as critical predictors of teachers' job satisfaction. Factors such as low student achievement, misbehavior, and classroom discipline can negatively impact satisfaction. Their study identified four key factors influencing job satisfaction: teacher self-efficacy, teacher-student relationships, participation in decision-making, and classroom discipline climate. Karavas (2010) echoed these findings in a study of Greek EFL teachers, indicating that student interactions significantly affect job satisfaction.

Professional development is crucial for teacher satisfaction. Safari and Davaribina (2021) found that it is a stronger predictor of satisfaction than reflective thinking among EFL teachers in Iran. Kang and Mavrogordato (2025) also established the link between professional development and satisfaction, analyzing responses from teachers across the United States. They found that quality professional development, characterized by coherent structure and tailored approaches, enhances satisfaction. Effective development should address pedagogical and technological needs, providing targeted training opportunities (Zhang et al., 2020). However, barriers like scheduling conflicts and costs can hinder participation (Zhang et al., 2020). Studies from various countries show that positive work environments and good teacher-student relationships increase job satisfaction, while workload and student behavior can reduce it.

Specific Factors in Online Teaching Environments

In online teaching environments, specific factors affect job satisfaction. Bolliger and Wasilik (2009) identified three main factors in online settings: student-related factors, teacher-related factors, and institutional support. Online teaching provides access to a broader range of students, including those from rural areas (Bolliger et al., 2014), but teachers often struggle to establish personal connections with students online, which can hinder satisfaction (Perreault et al., 2002).

Teacher-related factors influencing satisfaction include motivation, self-efficacy, and perceptions of working conditions. Teachers confident in their abilities and motivated by intellectual challenges tend to report higher satisfaction (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). Self-efficacy, or belief in one's ability to impact student learning, is crucial for satisfaction. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to adopt innovative strategies and effective management techniques (Moe et al., 2010).

Flexibility and convenience are frequently cited benefits of online teaching. Wingo et al. (2017) noted that flexibility is a strong motivator for online instruction, allowing teachers to manage work-life balance more effectively (Wasilik & Bolliger, 2009). Stickney et al. (2019) found that flexibility significantly enhances satisfaction perceptions. Institutional support is another critical factor. Research indicates higher satisfaction when institutions recognize the importance of online education and provide supportive policies (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009).

including training, professional development, equitable compensation, and technical resources (Bolliger et al., 2014).

Sufficient training in teaching methods and technology-related skills is essential for satisfaction (Bolliger et al., 2014). Teachers often face challenges with learning management systems, which can either facilitate or hinder effectiveness (Stickney et al., 2019). Technical support services are vital for resolving course management and technology issues (Wasilik & Bolliger, 2009), though satisfaction with technical support doesn't always translate into higher satisfaction (Stickney et al., 2019).

Sun and Luo (2024) investigated online job satisfaction among English university teachers in China, finding that institutional support and self-efficacy significantly impact satisfaction. Facilitating conditions, such as technical and psychological support, are crucial for enhancing confidence in online teaching. Blundell et al. (2020) assessed job satisfaction among faculty members teaching fully online courses, indicating that instructor-student interaction was the primary factor for satisfaction, more so than institutional support.

Teacher readiness for online teaching, including technical skills and pedagogical knowledge, impacts satisfaction (Lim, 2023). Marasi et al. (2020) explored satisfaction factors and identified motivators like flexibility and personal development, and hygiene factors like institutional support. Faculty found online courses valuable, but noted limited interactions could impede learning.

In summary, teacher job satisfaction in online education faces specific challenges like limited student interaction and technological barriers, but offers opportunities like broader student reach and improved work-life balance. These factors can influence satisfaction, emphasizing the need for proactive engagement to enhance online teaching readiness and satisfaction. Despite growing research on online language teaching (Sun, 2025; Xu & Buckingham, 2024), this area remains in its early stages, especially regarding satisfaction (Stickney et al., 2019; Sun & Luo, 2024). Language instruction often requires more interactive environments to engage students effectively. Therefore, further research focused on specific teacher groups is necessary to develop tailored recommendations for their needs and challenges (Sun & Luo, 2024). Overall, studies exploring teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction in online EFL context are rare, indicating a gap that this qualitative study aims to address by investigating English teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction in online environments.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Participants and Sampling

This qualitative study used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit the participants. As noted by Dörnyei (2007), qualitative research sampling aims to achieve a deep understanding of the variables under investigation. The participants were selected based on specific criteria: they were required to hold a university degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and possess at least three years of experience in online English instruction. This ensured that the selected instructors had sufficient familiarity with English teaching methodologies and relevant experience in the online context to provide rich data for the study. The final participant group consisted of eight instructors, comprising five males and three females.

The initial pool of candidates for participation in this study was identified through various online language teaching platforms and social media groups dedicated to EFL instructors. This approach allowed the researchers to purposively recruit the participants who met the specific selection criteria, namely, holding a university degree in TEFL and having at least three years of

experience in online English instruction. By leveraging these digital communities, this study ensured access to a diverse and relevant group of online English teachers from different cities across Iran, facilitating a rich and varied dataset for the qualitative investigation. All participants were native Persian speakers residing in different cities across Iran. Their ages ranged from 25 to 42 years, and their educational background varied from BA to PhD in TEFL. Among the instructors, five participants, three females and two males, were full-time online educators. Two male teachers also conducted face-to-face classes in addition to their online instruction, while one male instructor taught English online part-time and held a job outside the English teaching field. Detailed profiles of the participants have been provided in [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Participants’ profile

Code	Gender	Age	Major	Degree	City	Native language	Teaching experience	Online teaching experience	Type of employment
PT1	Female	40	TEFL	MA	Ahvaz	Persian	13 years	4 years	Full-time
PT2	Female	25	TEFL	MA	Tehran	Persian	7 years	4 years	Full-time
PT3	Female	27	TEFL	MA	Qom	Persian	7 years	4 years	Full-time
PT4	Male	29	TEFL	BA	Mazandaran	Persian	7 years	4 years	Full-time
PT5	Male	36	TEFL	PhD	Esfahan	Persian	19 years	4 years	Full-time
PT6	Male	28	TEFL	MA	Urmia	Persian	7 years	4 years	Part-time
PT7	Male	32	TEFL	MA	Bushehr	Persian	10 years	4 years	Part-time
PT8	Male	42	TEFL	MA	Tehran	Persian	18 years	4 years	Part-time

Data Collection Procedure

A semi-structured interview was utilized to collect the necessary data. This approach includes a set of guiding questions while allowing the participants the flexibility to introduce new ideas ([Mackey & Gass, 2015](#)). The interview questions were crafted by the researchers after reviewing findings from related studies. To ensure the quality of the instrument, a series of open-ended questions were developed and sent to four individuals for piloting. It is important to clarify that the four participants involved in developing and providing feedback on the interview questions were selected as the pilot participants who share similar characteristics with the main participants of the study, but were not part of the final sample. This approach ensures that the interview instrument is both relevant and comprehensible to the target population without affecting the primary data collected from the main participant group. Based on their input, three open-ended questions were finalized. According to [Dörnyei \(2007\)](#), semi-structured interviews are typically conducted in three phases. In the first phase, one-on-one online meetings were arranged with each participant via Google Meet. This method was necessary due to the participants’ locations in different cities across Iran.

The second phase of data collection involved individual interviews conducted via Google Meet, following the Castillo-Montoya interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The participants were asked to respond to three main questions, one at a time. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were thanked for their time and contributions, and they were informed that they could reach out to the researchers later if they wished to provide any additional information.

All interviews were conducted in the participants' native language (Persian) to allow them to express their perceptions fully and comfortably. The audio recordings were carefully transcribed, and then, translated into English by a bilingual researcher proficient in both Persian and English. To enhance translation accuracy, the English transcripts were compared meticulously with the original audio recordings to verify fidelity and resolve any discrepancies. While formal back-translation was not employed due to resource limitations, we mitigated the potential translation bias by involving multiple researchers fluent in both languages to review the translated transcripts and discuss any uncertainties or ambiguous expressions. This collaborative approach helped ensure that the nuanced meanings and contextual subtleties of the participants' responses were retained. Furthermore, the participants were invited to confirm that the interpreted findings accurately reflected their views, contributing to the credibility of the data.

Each interview was audio-recorded, then transcribed and translated into English. To verify the accuracy of the transcripts, they were compared with the original audio files. In the final phase of the data collection process, the participants were given opportunities to share any additional information that had not been covered in the previous interview. A total of 24 interviews were conducted in three phases, amounting to 457 minutes of data for further analysis.

This study employs The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. JD-R is introduced by Demerouti et al. (2001) and serves as a valuable framework for understanding job satisfaction in various occupational settings, including teaching (Han et al., 2020). This model categorizes jobs into two broad categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands encompass aspects that require continuous effort and can lead to stress and burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). These demands can be classified as challenges (e.g., workload) or hindrances (e.g., role conflict), with challenges fostering development and hindrances obstructing it (Crawford et al., 2010).

Conversely, job resources facilitate personal development and work goal achievement while mitigating the negative impacts of job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Examples include pay, job security, support from colleagues, and opportunities for professional development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources enhance motivation and work engagement, leading to increased job satisfaction (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Additionally, personal resources such as resilience and perceived ability to manage challenges play a role in job satisfaction (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). These resources contribute to personal growth and well-being, with job resources having a more substantial positive influence on job satisfaction than the negative effects of job demands (Han et al., 2020).

Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis to interpret data gathered from semi-structured interviews with online EFL teachers. Multiple close readings of transcripts and repeated listening to audio recordings facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and meaningful themes. An inductive approach was used, meaning that codes and themes were generated directly from the data without imposing preconceived categories (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Initially, 39 codes were developed capturing diverse aspects of teachers' perceptions related to job satisfaction in online teaching contexts. These initial codes were then systematically

grouped into broader themes reflecting major factors influencing teachers’ experiences: context-related factors, student-related factors, and technology-related factors. This thematic structure aligned with the conceptual Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model underpinning the study, which categorizes workplace characteristics into job demands and job resources.

To ensure analytic rigor, member checking was employed, wherein the participants reviewed coded data and thematic interpretations to verify that the analysis accurately reflected their views and experiences. This collaborative validation was critical given the reliance of the study on subjective perceptions as primary data sources, strengthening credibility by directly incorporating participant feedback.

The thematic analysis highlighted key dimensions associated with job satisfaction in online ELT settings. These included resources such as autonomy, financial support, and technological tools, which positively influenced satisfaction. Conversely, job demands like technical difficulties, limited social interaction, and increased workload emerged as challenges detracting from teachers’ motivation and well-being.

By systematically organizing data through thematic analysis within the JD-R framework, the study provided a nuanced understanding of how various contextual, interpersonal, and technological factors interact to shape online English teachers’ job satisfaction. This approach offered rich qualitative insights beyond what standard quantitative measures typically reveal, emphasizing the importance of teachers’ subjective experiences in informing educational policies and practices.

4. RESULTS

The collected data on English teachers’ perceptions of job satisfaction across various domains of online teaching were thematically analyzed. Three overarching themes were identified: context-related factors, student-related factors, and technology-related factors (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2: Job satisfaction driven themes

Themes	Definition	Example	Frequency	Percentage
Context-related factors	Factors related to the features of online environments.	Flexibility of online contexts, financial resources, etc.	73	51%
Student-related factors	Factors related to students’ behavior and characteristics.	Student diversity, student success, etc.	33	23%
Technology-related factors	Factors related to the use of technology in teaching online.	Technical tools, and technology difficulties.	37	26%
Total			143	100%

Subsequently, these initial themes and their subcategories were organized into two general groups that align with the study’s conceptual framework, the JD-R model (see Appendix A). [Table 3](#) summarizes teachers’ perceptions of various factors influencing their job satisfaction within the framework of the JD-R model. It categorizes these factors into resource and demand sub-themes, presenting their frequency of mention by the participants. This table provides a structured overview of the key themes identified from teachers’ perspectives, highlighting how specific job characteristics impact their satisfaction in online teaching environments.

Table 3: Teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction according to JD-R model

Themes	Resources/ Demands	Sub-themes	Frequency
Context-related factors	Job resources	Teachers' sense of Autonomy	31
		Financial resources	19
		Flexibility of online contexts	17
	Job demands	Limited social interactions with stakeholders	4
		Unfair competition among teachers	2
Student-related factors	Job resources	Student diversity	7
		Student success	6
		Student satisfaction	15
	Job demands	Students' lack of accountability	5
Technology-related factors	Job resources	Technological tools for teaching	20
	Job demands	Technology difficulties	17
Total			143

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage distribution of various factors that influence English teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction. It visually compares the relative prominence of context-related, student-related, and technology-related factors, highlighting the role of each category on teachers' satisfaction levels in online teaching environments.

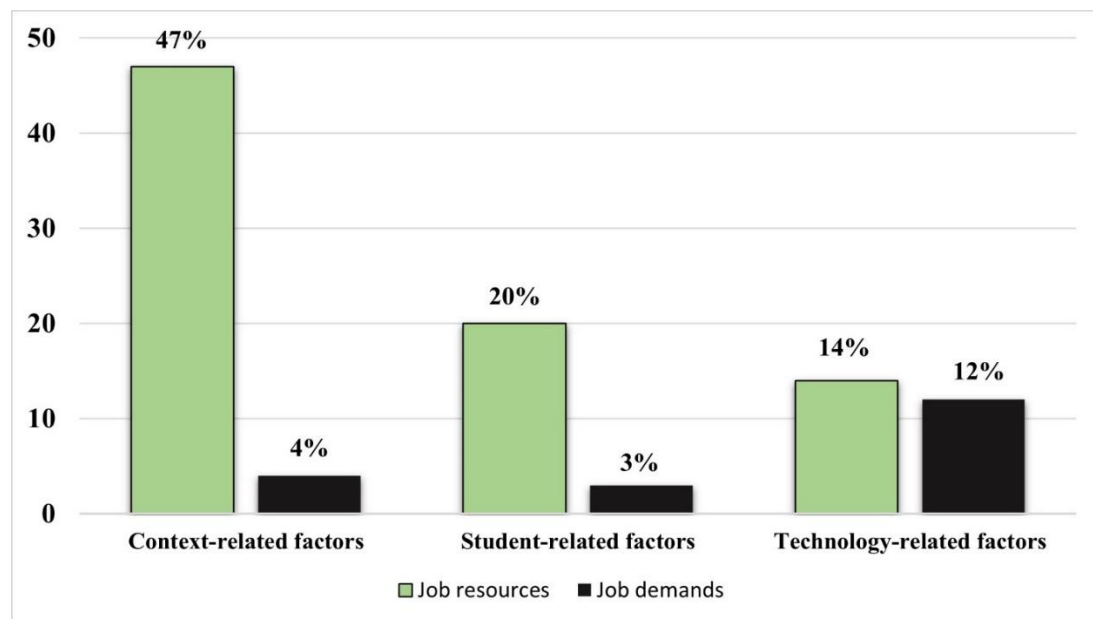
**Figure 1: Factors influencing English teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction**

Figure 2 presents an overview of online EFL teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction, highlighting the key themes, context-related, student-related, and technology-related factors, which influence their experiences. These factors interact to shape teachers' overall satisfaction, with positive

aspects like autonomy and student satisfaction enhancing fulfillment, while challenges such as technology difficulties and limited social interactions potentially detract from it.

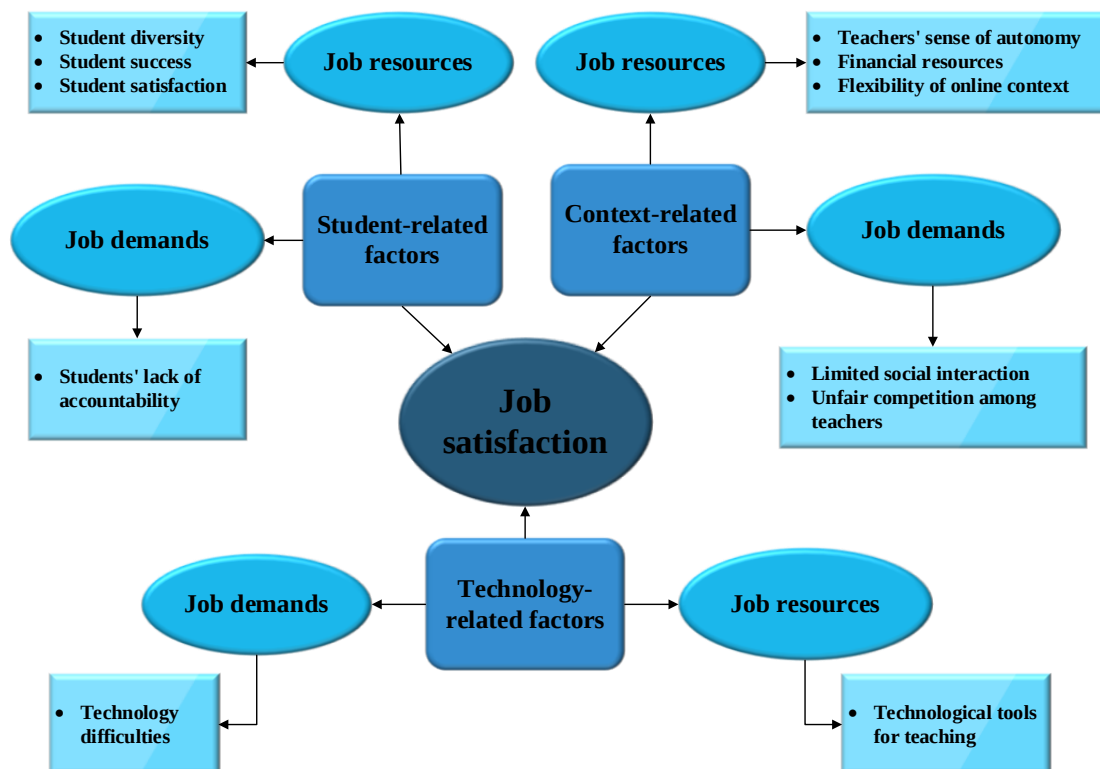


Figure 2: Online EFL teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction

Theme 1: Context-related Factors: Job Resources and Demands

Within the theme of context-related factors in online teaching environments, five subcategories emerged from the interviews with the participants. Based on the JD-R model, these were grouped into three potential job resources: autonomy, financial resources, and flexibility of online contexts. The factors categorized as potential job demands included limited social interactions with stakeholders and perceived unfair competition among teachers. The following sections describe these findings in more detail.

Teachers' Sense of Autonomy

All participants expressed a strong appreciation for the autonomy they experienced in various aspects of their profession. This autonomy enabled them to exercise flexibility and freedom in areas such as selecting teaching materials, determining class fees, scheduling, choosing online platforms, and establishing rules. The participants noted that high levels of autonomy were associated with their professional development. PT3 confirmed this perspective:

Quote 1

“For me, increased autonomy translates into higher job satisfaction, helping me reach the professional development goals I have set for myself more quickly, or at least facilitating that journey.”

The participants reported that their perceived autonomy allowed them to prioritize tasks and manage their time effectively. They indicated that autonomy was linked to expanded opportunities to conduct classes outside traditional school hours due to the reduced time constraints of in-person classes. Additionally, the greater professional flexibility afforded by high levels of autonomy created increased flexibility in their personal lives, enhancing their job satisfaction.

Financial Resources

Financial resources were identified as an important factor influencing teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction in online teaching. The participants indicated that they earned significantly more from teaching online classes compared to traditional institutional classrooms. PT6 explained:

Quote 2

"I can earn four to five times more than at a language center from just one hour of teaching online. My investment and commitment have increased, leading to better performance. Instead of taking five classes to reach my desired income, I take two and teach better."

In addition to direct payment, online teaching was associated with financial benefits through reduced commuting costs, allowing teachers to save on daily travel expenses. Notably, two female participants mentioned that students sometimes delayed paying class fees. To address this, the participants stated that, as autonomous teachers, they set specific rules regarding payment and negotiate these in the initial sessions to avoid conflicts.

Flexibility of Online Contexts

The participants highlighted the flexibility of online contexts as a significant job resource related to their job satisfaction. They appreciated its positive impacts on both their professional and personal lives. The participants explained that the flexibility of online teaching reduces commuting time. They described their commutes in very crowded cities of Iran, characterized by heavy traffic and harsh weather conditions, as a major demand that was draining and time-consuming. In online contexts, teachers did not have to dedicate hours to commuting to and from educational institutions. Time-saving is crucial, as the participants mentioned that they have various roles, such as university students and/or parents, and responsibilities in their academic, professional, and personal lives that require time and effort. PT7 explained:

Quote 3

"As a PhD student, managing my time is crucial. Online teaching saves time and reduces my burnout. For example, when I have a class at seven, I can turn on my laptop at six fifty-five, and everything is already prepared. I have more time to focus on other aspects of my life, like my dissertation, resumé, and articles, which enhances my academic satisfaction and reflects positively on my teaching."

In addition to saving time, the participants emphasized that the flexibility of online settings reduces spatial limitations for both teachers and students. For instance, they can attend classes even while traveling.

Limited Social Interactions with Stakeholders

Online teachers often spend extended periods teaching in solitary environments, typically at home, which can lead to reduced social interactions. The participants reported experiencing less interaction with their colleagues compared to their experiences in traditional educational settings. Among the participants, five held full-time online teaching positions, and three specifically identified limited social interaction as a challenge. For instance, PT3 explained:

Quote 4

“One of the drawbacks of online teaching is indeed the lack of social interaction. When I used to attend an institution, I had great communication with the receptionist, the director, the supervisors, and the fellow teachers. We would chat in the teacher’s room, which was a pleasant experience.”

Unfair Competition among Teachers

A minority of the participants expressed concern that the accessibility of online contexts for everyone, coupled with the lack of consistent observation and evaluation of teaching quality, may create challenges for online teachers. This situation leads to increased competition and a sense of unfairness among the educators. PT5 explained:

Quote 5

“One significant issue is that, due to the online format, many teachers are not evaluated, which leads to increased competition. As a result, individuals who may lack adequate knowledge or have not completed a teaching training course are entering the field. This creates a level of competition that can sometimes feel unfair.”

To address this challenge, several participants recommended that online teachers proactively cultivate essential personal resources, including patience, media literacy, commitment, integrity, online communication skills, and personal branding.

This theme aligns with the JD-R model as a job demand that adds psychological and social stress, impacting teachers' well-being. The participants' recommendations to develop personal resources to manage this challenge underscore its practical importance. Including this theme ensures a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing job satisfaction, particularly in the rapidly evolving and less regulated context of online teaching.

Theme 2: Student-related Factors: Job Resources and Demands

The theme of student-related factors encompasses aspects related to students' characteristics, behavior, and engagement. Based on an analysis using the JD-R model, three potential job resources were identified within this theme: student diversity, student success, and student satisfaction. Additionally, one potential job demand was identified: students' lack of accountability. Further details regarding these subcategories are presented below.

Student Diversity

Online contexts enable teachers to expand their networks and reach a wider audience, ranging from rural regions to modern cities across the globe. More than half of the participants noted that they

interact with diverse students from various locations, social classes, cultures, and age groups. As PT2 explained:

Quote 6

“Most of my students are from outside the country, and I really love this. I am learning from them about the cultures they live in, which I find fascinating and enriching. This is one of my primary motivations for teaching online and makes online teaching valuable for me.”

Teachers emphasized that engaging with a varied student population allows them to learn about different cultures, broaden their perspectives, and gain insights from their students. They noted that this engagement contributes to enhanced self-efficacy, personal and professional growth, increased income, and ultimately higher job satisfaction.

Student Success

The participants indicated that when students with various goals attend online English classes and achieve their desired results, teachers feel a sense of reward. The impact teachers have on their students directly influences their job satisfaction. PT1 exemplified this:

Quote 7

“I had an intermediate student who was preparing for a job interview in Portugal. We practiced interview techniques and discussed how to be persuasive during the interview. She performed very well and sent me a message saying the class was helpful. Experiences like this eliminate fatigue and greatly enhance my satisfaction.”

Students’ success not only enhances teachers’ job satisfaction, but can also lead to increased student satisfaction. This, in turn, can result in a higher number of students attending online classes, further boosting teachers’ job satisfaction. Therefore, student satisfaction is considered an independent job resource.

Student Satisfaction

The participants emphasized that student satisfaction is a top priority. They dedicate time to conducting needs analyses during initial sessions and consistently gather feedback from students to align the class with their interests. This allows them to adjust their approaches, methodologies, and materials to better meet students’ needs. PT5 emphasized:

Quote 8

“A teacher should guide the educational content in a way that aligns with students’ interests rather than just sticking to a set of textbooks. For example, if you notice that many students are interested in technology, you should incorporate more technological elements into your lessons.”

In addition, teachers consider students’ preferences when selecting platforms for conducting classes. The participants noted that providing students with a sense of worth and the freedom to participate in decision-making encourages engagement in their learning process,

leading to greater satisfaction. The participants stated that learner satisfaction enhances their own job satisfaction in two ways: first, they feel confident and enthusiastic knowing they are performing well and that their teaching is effective; second, satisfied learners are more likely to recommend online classes to others, resulting in positive outcomes such as increased income and an enhanced professional reputation for teachers.

Students' Lack of Accountability

The participants noted that when students take responsibility for their learning and appreciate their teachers' time and effort, it positively affects their motivation. Conversely, a lack of commitment from students and a tendency to take online classes for granted negatively impact teachers' job satisfaction. The participants shared instances where students, particularly those in general English courses, arrived late or canceled classes without valid reasons. For example, PT2 remarked:

Quote 9

“Some language learners undervalue online classes; they often believe that if they ignore the program and do not attend, it will not be a problem. Last-minute cancellations and absences, along with a lack of respect for online classes, significantly affect my satisfaction.”

The participants indicated that, as autonomous teachers, they establish clear rules and adjust their teaching approaches to mitigate the negative impacts of students' misbehavior on their job satisfaction. In some cases, they even refuse to admit such learners, believing that students' lack of accountability affects their success and ultimately tarnishes teachers' reputations.

Theme 3: Technology-related Factors: Job Resources and Demands

Effective online teaching requires the integration of technology to create an engaging learning environment. Technology-related factors encompass the impact of technology on teachers' job satisfaction. Within this theme, two subcategories emerged: technical tools for teaching, which serve as a job resource, and technology difficulties, which represent a job demand. These subthemes are elaborated upon below.

Technological Tools for Teaching

All participants recognized technology as a vital job resource, as it provides free access to educational websites and tutorial videos. Teachers can collaborate with language teaching websites or create their own tutorial sites to showcase their skills and reach students. PT6 emphasized this point:

Quote 10

“You can share videos, audio files, and interactive online exercises. Some learners are visual; they learn better when they see information. Others are auditory; they learn better by listening. Some are kinesthetic; they learn best when they are moving around.”

PT6 explained that technology provides opportunities to create an effective learning environment for students. One particularly popular tool is the artificial intelligence (AI), which the

participants highlighted as an assistant that helps them prepare lesson plans, discussion questions, reading materials, grammar exercises, and customized assessments. PT7 elaborated on the benefits of AI:

Quote 11

“For example, if I have a language class at A1 or B2 level and we discussed crime that day, I ask AI for speaking topics or a writing prompt related to that. AI can provide more ideas, intriguing questions, and better teaching resources.”

Furthermore, technology facilitates interaction between teachers and learners. The participants noted that they can answer students’ questions and check homework outside of scheduled class time.

Technology Difficulties

The participants reported experiencing technology-related difficulties stemming from the low quality of technical infrastructure in Iran, which they identified as a job demand. These challenges included frequent power outages, weak internet connections, and platform inefficiencies. The participants mentioned that power outages, especially during the summer months, often force them to cancel and reschedule classes. PT8 explained:

Quote 12

“There have been times when I had to cancel classes because of power outages. Sometimes, the power goes out in the middle of a class, and the battery of my computer dies, which adds a lot to my stress.”

In addition, the participants noted that unstable and slow internet connections, attributed to weak infrastructure or politically-motivated restrictions, disrupt the teaching process. Some reported that reliable internet access is unavailable in certain areas, and even in major cities, heavy internet traffic can affect speed. Frequent disconnections often force them to repeat teaching points or cancel sessions altogether. The participants also reported that some Iranian platforms, such as Skyroom, might unexpectedly mute their microphones or turn off their cameras during class sessions.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study revealed three main sets of factors affecting online EFL teachers’ job satisfaction: context-related, student-related, and technology-related factors. Context factors comprise key job resources such as autonomy, financial resources, and flexibility, alongside demands like limited social interaction and unfair competition.

Autonomy stood out as the most frequently cited resource, significantly enhancing job satisfaction and motivation by enabling teachers to select materials tailored to student needs and schedule classes flexibly. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which suggests autonomy fulfills essential human needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Prior studies have linked teacher self-efficacy positively to job satisfaction (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Sun & Luo, 2024; Wang et al., 2020). However, this study identifies self-efficacy as an outcome of job resources such as autonomy and student success, rather than an independent resource.

Financial resources also played a crucial role, consistent with the JD-R model's emphasis on pay as a vital job resource. Adequate compensation motivates teachers to invest in professional development, improving instructional quality. Although challenges like managing payments exist, teachers mitigate these through clear financial guidelines.

Flexibility in online teaching positively influenced teachers' preference over traditional instruction by removing time and space constraints, enabling better balance between personal and professional responsibilities. This concurs with findings by [Bolliger and Wasilik \(2009\)](#) and [Stickney et al. \(2019\)](#), who emphasized flexibility as key to satisfaction.

Conversely, limited social interaction provoked feelings of isolation. Social interaction fulfills the human need for belonging, a significant factor in choosing teaching as a profession. Interestingly, this study did not find a strong relationship between collaboration and job satisfaction, paralleling [Lopes and Oliveira \(2020\)](#), possibly due to the centralized educational system in Iran which limits cooperative opportunities among independent online educators.

Student-related factors influencing satisfaction were diversity, success, satisfaction, and accountability. Diversity broadened teachers' cultural experiences and professional networks. Student success provided tangible evidence of teacher effectiveness, which boosted job satisfaction. Meeting learner needs increased self-efficacy and generated positive referrals, enhancing financial gains.

Contrary to previous studies emphasizing teacher-learner interaction, the participants reported no significant differences between online and face-to-face interaction quality, suggesting technology can sustain meaningful communication ([Blundell et al., 2020](#)). However, students' lack of accountability including tardiness and cancellations was a disruptive demand lowering satisfaction.

Technology-related factors presented a dual role. Technological tools were identified as vital resources allowing access to instructional materials and collaboration. Yet, notable demands arose from technology failures including power outages and unstable, slow internet, often caused by infrastructural weaknesses and political restrictions. These difficulties caused stress, disrupted class continuity, and reduced job satisfaction.

The salience of autonomy can be contextualized by the traditionally centralized education system in Iran. Online teaching provides escape from bureaucratic control, rendering autonomy a significant form of professional liberation for Iranian educators. Similarly, increased financial resources gained through online teaching are especially important given economic pressures and limited institutional support.

The study suggests advancing the JD-R model by integrating socio-political and contextual factors that shape how job demands and resources are experienced. Iranian online teachers face unique stressors such as political internet constraints that intensify demands and influence resource utility. Such macro-level influences mediate the effectiveness of autonomy and pay.

Situating findings within the educational, economic, and technological context of Iran reveals complex causal mechanisms and calls for refinement in existing frameworks. Acknowledging structural and contextual moderators enriches understanding of job satisfaction in global online teaching contexts, presenting a more nuanced analysis beyond descriptive accounts.

Implications for policy and practice include improving technological infrastructures and support, expanding access to diverse student populations, and addressing technology-related demands to reduce turnover and enhance satisfaction. Traditional teachers could develop digital literacy skills to transition smoothly to online platforms. Engaging teachers in reflective discussions fosters collaboration and motivation.

Future research should utilize larger quantitative or mixed-method samples to investigate causal relationships between autonomy, job satisfaction, and other variables. Case studies of specific online platforms and cross-regional comparisons would deepen insights into the diversity of online EFL teaching environments.

Limitations include the qualitative design and small sample size limiting causal inference and generalizability. The Iranian context and cultural specificity constrain applicability elsewhere. Reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, and omission of quantitative data restricts analysis depth. Addressing these limitations in future studies will strengthen evidence and broaden understanding.

In conclusion, the qualitative exploration offers valuable insight into online English teachers' job satisfaction, delineating resources and demands across context, student, and technology factors. Autonomy, financial gain, and flexibility constitute vital job resources underpinning satisfaction, while technology challenges and limited social interaction present key demands. Despite demands, teachers generally reported satisfaction, highlighting the potential for online settings to provide an enriching, autonomous, and financially rewarding career path amid contextual challenges.

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Appendices

Appendix A: JD-R model (Yeh, 2015, p. 48)

Job Characteristics	Definition	Example
Job demands	“They refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job, which usually require physical and/or psychological efforts from the workers and may generate certain physiological and/or psychological costs”	“Unsafe or unfavorable work environments, work pressure, emotionally demanding interactions, role ambiguity”
Job resources	“They refer to organizational endowments or facilities that help achieve work goals, reduce job demands and associated costs, and enhance personal growth, learning and development”	“Job autonomy, pay, career prospects, and job security, good relations with supervisors and coworkers, role clarity.”