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Implicit Bias as Perceived and Developed in Online EFL Teaching/Learning Practices: Learners' Perceptions

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Abstract

Implicitly biased teaching practices or the unconscious discriminatory actions of teachers create the learning-threatening illusion of being biased in the minds of learners. This study identified the main manifestations of implicitly biased teaching practices in online EFL learning, and then, delved deeper into the factors shaping their manifestations. Participants of the study were 45 intermediate-level EFL learners attending an online course in an Iranian public educational institute. Each participant was required to report on the biased teaching practices manifested during the three-month course. In the end, focused interviews were conducted to identify the contributing factors to their perceptions. Results of the study came up through content analysis indicated that intermediate-level learners perceive implicitly biased teaching practices as micro-assault (underrating) or micro-insult (demeaning) behavior each of which could result in a different reaction and participation pattern among themselves. This study concludes that false expectations, negative comparisons, and the online nature of communication are the main factors determining what learners regarded as biased teaching practices. Moreover, this study rejects the efficacy of micro-invalidation in preventing implicit bias in online learning. This study encourages EFL teachers to address their implicit bias through considering the participation and development patterns of their learners.

Keywords: English learning, English teaching, implicit bias, perceptions, teachers' practice

Received: June 17, 2023

Revised: November 15, 2023

Accepted: January 15, 2024

Article type: Research Article

DOI:10.22111/IJALS.2024.44040.2310

Publisher: University of Sistan and Baluchestan

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How to cite: Yousofi, N., Vakili, Sh. (2024). Implicit bias as perceived and developed in online EFL teaching/learning practices: Learners' perceptions. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 16(1), 75-88.

<https://doi.org/10.22111/IJALS.2024.44040.2310>

1. Introduction

Implicit bias has been defined as unintentional discriminatory mental impressions (Gonzalez et al., 2021) which influence one's thoughts and actions. It includes unstated negative assessments about people's race, gender, culture and religion which can result in irreparable damages to their identities (Rudman, 2004). Implicit bias is different from explicit bias in that it does not contain intentional "pejorative terms" and "inflammatory language" (Organista et al., 2000, p. 13), and individuals may not know that their judgments and actions are subtly shaped by implicit attitudes and biases (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006) although their interlocutors are prone to perceive and react to it.

As a reflection of self-realization experiences and processes implicit bias in educational contexts may affect learners' perceptions of the instructors' behavior (Sukhera et al., 2018) and instructors' perceptions of abilities where, for example, they underrate female learners' ability (Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2014) and expect low learning outcomes for them. Implicit biases delivered through unintentional disdainful tones and comments send disparaging messages to minoritized learners (Reinholz et al., 2022) and lead to their 'death by a thousand cuts' (Nadal et al., 2011). Also, implicit bias can reproduce racial discriminations in academic contexts (Dovidio et al., 2002), lead to higher anxiety and discomfort during academic interactions (Dasgupta & Rivera, 2006), and trigger cognitive resources (Shelton, 2003). In this way, implicit biases could have destructive impacts on learning processes. Given that, learners' evaluation of biased behavior constitutes a major component of the instruction delivered in most institutions where in learners are asked to complete evaluation forms anonymously (Abrami et al., 2007) to follow the well-defined procedures used for evaluation in the classroom contexts (Cashin, 2007), or to take part in online surveys (Ballantyne, 2003). Thus, learners' evaluation has the potential of being used both for accounting for what is meant by bias among themselves, and interpreting instructors' cultural and social interactions.

In recent years, there has been a growing view that online learning facilitates EFL learners' development through overcoming time and place limitations and encouraging meaning negotiation (Baten et al., 2009) which simply triggers meaningful learning (Chen, 2016) and guarantees social and cognitive development (Norrick, 1987). Despite that, however, nothing special has been done to investigate learners' perceptions of implicitly biased teaching practices and their underlying factors in online learning where a lack of face-to-face interaction makes it prone to disregarding learners' emotional concerns such as equal respect and attention (Butz et al., 2015), and influencing their learning processes negatively (Edelson, 2000). In filling this gap in the literature, the present study focuses on the perception of intermediate-level learners who have been mainly overlooked in bias literature although they constitute a major proportion of the EFL learners' community. In sum, the present study aimed at answering the following questions:

Q1. Based on intermediate-level learners' perceptions; what are the main realizations of implicitly biased teaching practices in online EFL learning?

Q 2. What factors lay behind intermediate level learners' perceptions of implicitly biased teaching practices in online EFL learning?

2. Background

The current literature on bias has mainly focused on its' manifestations in university contexts which involve face-to-face interactions. Tamimi Sa'd and Eames (2021) investigated the explicit types of bias 65 Iranian EFL learners perceived in their teachers' discourse in the classroom context. Their study revealed that one-third of the study participants experienced explicit bias based on their skin color, social class and political and religious beliefs. Rich and Troudi (2006) analyzed the racialization senses experienced by five male Saudi Arabian learners at a university in England and argued that race, ethnicity, and religion were the main factors against which learners were discriminated. The researchers added that these bias forms contribute to the learners' status as being perceived as international or foreign students. Similarly, Sengstock (2009) argued that American university students experience explicit bias based on their gender, skin color and belonging to a religion and ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, Seider and Hillman (2011) observed that privileged learners in the university-based learning programs tend to differentiate between themselves and other privileged students whom they perceive as different through using an "othering" language. In this way, discrimination is exerted against privileged learners, too.

According to Madva (2012), both teachers and learners confirm that racism and inequality are exerted against learners from different religious and social backgrounds. Despaigne (2013) goes beyond that to state that learners perceive fear, unequal treatment, and disrespect for their local languages in educational contexts. Thus, pre-service teachers should receive culturally relevant teaching in a way that reflections about diverse learners are promoted. Also, classroom observations can provide teachers with feedback on their teaching practices (Wulff & Nyquist, 1986). Relying on the above arguments, Jacoby-Senghor et al. (2016) examined the effects of white and black teachers' implicit bias on their teaching performance. They put 200 black and white instructors into same-race or cross-race dyads, and measured their implicit racial behavior through subconscious priming tasks. Focusing on a subsequent test of the materials, the researchers concluded that the white teachers' bias predicted lower scores for black learners. Also, the teachers' anxiety could positively influence this relationship. Brown (2018) stated that teachers' demonstration of bias is based on what is regarded as true in society. Teachers' bias, thereby, leads to prototypes such as a grading bias based on the niceness of the learners and their relationship with the teachers. Mc Millan et al. (2021) argue that students' evaluation of their peers' performance is significantly low or critical and this illuminates the role of what teachers perceive and present as true evaluation. Rosen (2017) presents another piece of evidence of students' bias through tackling learners' final

evaluations of their educational course targeting such issues as teaching quality and easiness. Results of the study came up through analyzing ratings of 190,006 professors showed that learners implicitly related the teaching quality feature to the physical attractiveness and genders of their professors. Felton, Mitchell, and Stinson (2004) analyzed the correlation between instructional quality and easiness of communication for 1148 faculty members. Based on their findings, the correlation between teaching quality and easiness was about $r=0.67$ ($p<0.01$) implying that the impression of an insult-free communication is highly related to teaching quality. The researchers postulated that the professors may not be aware of the existence of any form of bias in their language. Therefore, they may not be able to do anything about bias. This lack of awareness may excuse their implicit discrimination. Yet, Hahn et al. (2014) argued that raising professors' theoretical awareness of the nature of biased terms and interaction could not improve the ability of preventing their usage in communication with students. Tamimi Sa'd and Eames (2021) further believe that intentional prevention of bias is a complicated issue due to the interdisciplinary nature of the discrimination phenomenon; it is associated with such diverse areas as applied linguistics, critical discourse analysis, identity construction, power relations and sociology. Therefore, bias does not directly originate from education.

Boysen (2009) analyzed the biased discourse of learners toward professors through investigating the types and frequencies of bias that teachers perceive in university classes. According to the researchers, almost half of university professors experience both implicit and explicit bias types including offensive humors, avoidance or isolation, slurs and insults. Among these bias types sexual (20%) and race (19%) complaints were the most frequently reported types of bias. Bleske-Rechek and Michels (2010) noticed that the biased views of students toward their university professors targeted a few of their academic characteristics (quality of instruction, learning goal orientations, grade average).

As can be noticed from the reviewed studies, bias manifests in different forms in face-to-face contexts. Bias, also, can be shaped by either students' perceptions of reality (e.g., Seider & Hillman, 2011) or what they are transmitted as true (e.g., Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016; Mc Millan et al., 2021; Rosen, 2017). This raises the question of how bias manifests in online learning and what main factors base its' manifestations.

3. Method

a. Participants

Based on convenient sampling, 45 EFL learners (18 males and 27 females), who were studying in an Iranian public language institute, were selected to participate in this study. They had different social and cultural backgrounds and were aged between 14 and 26. They were homogenous in terms of their proficiency level in that they all were B1 (intermediate level based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)) EFL learners. The study participants

were divided into three online English classes. They were instructed by the same teacher (one of the researchers of the present study).

b. Context (the Online Learning and Teaching Platform)

Participants of all three classes in this study received electronic instruction via the Big Blue Button platform which made it possible for the teacher to not only share online instructional materials (e.g., slides and audio and video files) synchronously with learners but also communicate with them orally and in the written forms. In addition, participants used Eitaa (an Iranian free messenger) to communicate personally with the teacher outside the online context.

c. Instructional Material and Activities

Instructional material in the present study was the book “Eight5a” as prescribed by the language institute for the B1 level EFL learners. As a component of the “Eight” course book which had been developed based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Iranian EFL learners, Eight5a included two parts: Student’s Book and Workbook. Student’s book involved four units (personality traits, crimes, public services, and challenges) each of which had four lessons employing a wide range of activities such as vocabulary and pronunciation practice, pair and group discussion, conversation making, grammar practice, and listening and reading comprehension. The Workbook section included exercises for each lesson of the four units. After getting a lesson, learners had to do its’ relevant workbook exercises as their homework and check them with the class next session. Another part of the learners’ homework was a “Journal” activity in which the teacher presented the learners with a topic (mainly based on the title of each lesson) and asked them to prepare an oral report or a written text about it for the next session.

During the study, the teacher felt committed to a two-stage teaching plan as prescribed by the language institute. For the first stage, she had to check the learners’ homework. At this stage, which did not have to exceed 20 minutes, the teacher randomly selected some learners and asked them to answer the workbook exercises and then, present their journals to the class. During the second stage, she had to teach a new lesson, wherein she could employ individualized and group work activities. Depending on the learners’ level of performance, the teacher could highlight learners’ errors and provide them with corrective feedback at both stages. She could also praise them for acting flawlessly. Therefore, it can be inferred that the two stages demanded learners’ active participation and interactions both with their teacher and classmates.

d. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure

The online English course for each class comprised 19 sessions during a three-month term which started on July 10th and ended on September 10th, 2021. Classes were instructed twice a week

on Mondays and Thursdays. As a part of the training ritual at the beginning of the term, the teacher informed learners on how their instruction would be. Thus, they had a chance to get an understanding of their duties and see the logic behind the employed instructional activities during the term. To avoid the Hawthorn effect (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989), however, the learners did not get informed about the study's purpose. Instead, they were asked to feel free to express their possible problems with the ways the teacher treated them and reacted to their performance. They could express their concerns both during their class time (via the synchronous oral/written communication capability of the Big Blue Button) and outside the class (via Eitaa messenger). Learners were assured that their complaints did not negatively affect their final assessment and scores.

During the instructional course, the teacher's primary focus was on teaching language skills in a way that could engage all learners and lead to their successful learning. For each event of complaint, the teacher recorded its' details including the name of the learner who expressed it, the subject of the objection, the learner's claims and supporting evidence. Then, she offered her own explanation to repair her relationship with the learner and to prevent the occurrence of such negative perception in future.

At the end of the term, the teacher referred to her list and identified the learners who used to complain more frequently than the others and conducted focused interviews with them. The interviews aimed at giving them a better chance of expressing their impressions of the implicitly biased teaching practices. Therefore, they were conducted in Persian (the native tongue of the study participants) to ensure that their proficiency problems would not negatively influence conveying their ideas. Then, interview transcripts were translated into English. To preserve learners' confidentiality, pseudonyms are chosen for the learners whose objections and comments are reported through this study.

This study applied the content analysis approach to the obtained data from both the instructional sessions and interviews. According to Schreier (2012), content analysis reveals the common patterns in the data through coding and categorizing text. It is noteworthy that in answering each research question the researchers relied on data from both the initial objections and interviews; there was no one-to-one relationship between data sources and research questions. Where necessary, also, the exact interaction between learners and instructors is reported to help with clearing the conditions.

In this study, the interpretation of what was a biased action was based on learners' understanding which could be polluted with their personal feelings and evaluations. Therefore, care should be taken in considering all reported objections as real forms of bias.

4. Results

The first question of the study targeted the main realizations of implicitly biased teaching practices in online EFL learning at the intermediate level. According to our results, the first stage of the teaching plan triggered the impression of being biased two times more than the second stage although its length was much shorter than it. This was justifiable by the competitive nature of the workbook and journal checking stage wherein each learner sought a chance to show his/her knowledge through doing the activities for which they had some days to get ready. Considering the time limitation of this stage and the high number of volunteers to participate in journal and workbook activities, the teacher tried to give an equal chance of participation to all learners. But, some learners used to ask for more chances of participation the ignorance of which led to the impression of being biased. They were so concerned about getting a second or even third chance that they disregarded the teacher's feedback on their errors and repeated the error in their next answers. This contradicts Sauro's (2009) finding as the delayed performance of online learners did not lead to their cognitive relief and did not obviate their social need to respond immediately. Trofi Movich et al. (2007) consider learners' cognitive and affective conditions as one of the factors influencing feedback effectiveness. Therefore, it could be argued that the competitive nature of the first stage threatened learners' cognitive and affective conditions in a way that they were more concerned with getting participation chances than getting feedback. Table 1 shows the proportion of implicitly biased teaching practices in both stages.

Table 1

Frequencies of Implicitly Biased Teaching Practices in Different Stages of Online EFL Learning

Teaching Stage	Frequency
Workbook and journal checking	14 (66/66%)
Teaching the new lesson	7 (33/33%)
Total no, 21 (100%)	

Tables 2 and 3 present the main categories of implicit bias in each stage and their frequencies as perceived by intermediate-level EFL learners.

Table 2

Implicitly Biased Teaching Practices of Stage 1 (Workbook and Journal Checking)

Learners Perceptions of the Implicitly Biased Teaching Practices	Frequency
1 Being ignored when volunteering to answer the workbook exercises	6 (42.85%)
2 Bing ignored when volunteering to present their journals	4 (28.57%)
3 Feeling embarrassed when their errors were highlighted and corrected	3 (21.42%)
4 Not being addressed in the same way as other students	1 (7.14%)
Total no, 14 (100%)	

As Table 2 shows, the main objections of learners during the first stage came up when the teacher checked the exercises of the previous lesson with the learners (category 1) and asked some of them to present their journals (category 2). Despite their higher frequency, however, these objections were solved more easily than those of categories 3 and 4 because they didn't involve what the interviewed learners called "contempt". More precisely, backed by the interview data, implicitly biased teaching practices in stage 1 could be further placed into two main categories; underrating discriminatory (items 1 and 2) and demeaning discriminatory (items 3 and 4). The dichotomy which is in line with Sue et al.'s (2007) representations of implicit bias types in educational contexts, will be referred to as micro-assault and micro-insult discrimination throughout this study.

Complainant learners to the micro-assault behavior believed that their abilities were not valued as highly as others, whereas the objectors to the micro-insult behavior regarded the teacher's behavior as scornful and contemptuous. For example, Zahra (a learner who objected to category 1) stated that "*our previous teacher said that I'm a top student, and always let me to be more active. But, you don't do so. You usually ignore my passion to do the exercises. Aren't I a top student?*". Another piece of evidence supporting the micro-assault- micro-insult dichotomy came up from the statement of Mohhana (a learner whose objections were based on categories 1 and 3). She argued that,

I think you intentionally don't let me be active while checking workbook ... [I am allowed to answer] just two or three questions. You reject my efforts of being active and wait for a long time for weak students' responses. I can answer all difficult questions! And, you stress my weakness before other students [when you] show my error, it is like an offense to me It makes me feel upset.

Note; underlined parts represent emphatic words and phrases. [within brackets phrases] are added to the original statements.

In the above quotation, the word "can" and the phrase "all difficult questions" were served by Mohhana to prove her ability and the underrating nature of the teachers' behavior manifested through limiting the number of questions she could answer every session. Nevertheless, she used a negative term (an offense) to describe the act of highlighting and correcting her errors. Further analysis of the interactions of the teacher and Mohhana during the error identification and correction process, which aimed at identifying its' insulting qualities, showed that Mohhana had her own mental model of being biased based on which any action of the teacher, which threatened her prestige and did not add to it, was a sign of a biased teaching practice. In this way, nothing more than highlighting her errors could make her feel being biased because it could threaten her position before other students. As a result, she stated her objection explicitly in the class to repair her reputation. Uhlmann and Nosek (2012) call explicit objection as "self-enhancing biases" (p. 108) and argue that when a person's worth is questioned, they tend to defend their position and to regain their level of integrity which involves considering oneself against other learners in the class.

Furthermore, the comparison between oneself and the class showed that the complainant learners considered online learning environment more of an individual nature than a collaborative one. In this regard, Sauro (2009) states that online instruction creates a virtual learning environment contextualizing independent learning for each learner. In the same vein, Dowling Godfrey and Gyles (2003) maintain that online learning may not encourage collaboration as much as classroom learning does.

The objection to item 4 captured the subtle difference in the way the teacher addressed a new learner and another one the teacher knew for years. According to the complainant learner, the teacher did not address her as enthusiastically as the other learner (yesss, Maryam vs. oh, yesssss! Vahid). According to Conaway and Bethune (2015), students' names could trigger the impression of being biased in the sense that they might show their being neglected and evaluated negatively. Referring to the micro-assault-micro-insult dichotomy, one can infer that the teacher could hardly convince the objector that she did not mean demeaning her.

Table 3

Implicitly Biased Teaching Practices of Stage 2 (Teaching the New Lesson)

Learners' Perceptions of the Implicitly Biased Teaching Practices	Frequency
1 Playing down their intelligence	4 (57.14%)
2 Disregarding their social position	1(14.28%)
3 Not getting a response to their question	2 (28.57%)
Total no, 7 (100%)	

Objections to the second teaching stage presented in Table 3, resulted in more violent objections and responses compared to those of the first stage. In other words, learners considered their related manifestations among representations of micro-insult behavior. For example, in relation to item 1 manifested through ignoring the quick responses of some learners to the posed questions by the teacher, complainant learners showed their objections through saying their answers without waiting for the teacher's permission, interrupting other learners' speech and disregarding the correct pronunciation of the answer. In the following excerpt, for example, Sara took Parisa's turn. As can be noticed, she was so hasty that she used present participle (repairing) instead of the past participle (repaired).

Teacher: *Parisa it is your turn.*

The boiler needs

Sara: *the boiler needs **TO BE REPAIRING**.*

Some complainant learners took a step further and changed their participation patterns when they thought that they were not valued enough before other learners (second category objection). They remained inactive for the rest of the class time. The following excerpt targets the issue.

Amir Hossein: *I'm better than anyone else in the class. Why do you stop me answering the questions [of the new lesson] quickly?*

Teacher: *Amir Hossein; you are a really smart student. But, you want to answer all questions! if I allow you to answer all questions within a few seconds, I will deprive other learners from thinking about and learning them.*

Amir Hossein: *so, why don't you praise [me] more than others?*

Teacher: *in that way, other students might get disappointed and think that they're not good at all.*

Amir Hossein: *Oh, Thanks*

Note; underlined parts represent emphatic words and phrases. [within brackets phrases] are added to the original statements.

As could be inferred from the above examples, complainant learners, at the second stage, directly demanded for unequal treatment in a way that not only their individual differences are respected, but also others' weaknesses are highlighted. Rudman (2004) state that learners' negative feelings about their classmates which are messaged directly might influence their decision making and result in limiting learning outcomes for other learners. In the same vein, Reinholz et al. (2022) warn that differences in participation opportunities lead to lower learning chances for marginalized learners. Thus, teachers need to analyze patterns of classroom participation and the academic development of learners to control and address their biases (DiAngelo, 2018).

During the online course, two learners reacted to the teachers' unresponsiveness to their questions. After further consideration, the teacher noticed that she unintentionally left their questions unanswered while she was explaining the grammar points. The influence of neglect as a form of implicit bias could not be neutralized even at the end of the term. In fact, it was noticed that the implicit bias sent disparaging messages to minoritized learners (Reinholz et al., 2022) and led to their 'death by a thousand cuts' (Nadal et al., 2011). Reinholz (2016) argues that teachers' retrospective reflection on their actions and experiences can reveal their biased actions, prevent their reoccurrence and improve their future actions.

The second question of the study aimed at identifying the factors that lay behind intermediate-level learners' perceptions of being biased. Based on our findings, three main factors represented in Table 4, shaped learners' perceptions of being biased.

Table 4
Factors Forming Learners' Perceptions of Being Biased

Underlying Factors	Original Representations of Factors
1 False Attitudes of Being Biased	Disregarding other learners' rights
2 Social Comparison	Positive things about themselves and negative things about others
3 Potentials of the Online Learning Context	Lacking visual and verbal signals, prevailing an individualistic learning perspective

Based on our findings, most of the objections during the online term represented learners' false understanding of their being biased; they simply believed that biased teaching practices were

those that contradicted their excessive desires. For example, in answering workbook activities, being biased meant not receiving as many participation turns as they wanted irrespective of their classmates' participation willingness. Similarly, in new lesson teaching stage, being biased meant the teachers' inadvertency to their show off of being smart, skillful and impressive. Seider and Hillman (2011) argue that students' own perceptions of reality might wrongly convince them that they are being biased. In this way, learners have to be made familiarized with their own rights and those of others in learning contexts.

According to our results, all the complainant learners were either top students or those who regarded themselves as top students. They clearly argued that they were better than others, and in this way, they made a negative comparison between themselves and others. Van Dijk (2008) argues that negative comparison as a form of social comparison involves saying good things "about us" and bad things about "them". In our study, learners used such sentences as "*I'm better than anyone else in the class*" and "*I am a top student*", to emphasize their positive qualities and "*other weak students*" to highlight others negative qualities. Another conclusion to be taken here is that gender and political, racial, economic factors might not play a significant role in the impression of being biased in online learning as the complainant learners only highlighted their linguistic in their comparison. This contradicted Conaway and Bethune (2015) who emphasized the role of racial and ethnic factors in online learning.

Finally, the online context of learning made learners' impression of being biased more complicated by limiting the visual and verbal signals the teacher could benefit from in the classroom contexts in recognizing and treating bias. As a result, learners could easily develop the internal attitude of being biased (Chugh, 2004) and resist against teacher's explanations. Supporting evidence for this claim were the cases in which the teacher unintentionally left some questions unanswered or called two learners differently as referred to above. Another fact about the online context of learning is the individualistic perspective it privileged; learners felt that they had one-to-one communication with the teacher rather than being a member of a whole community as it usually occurs in the classroom context. Turner et al. (1979) maintain that group communication influences not only learners' development but also what they perceive as appropriate or inappropriate behavior. Therefore, the online context of learning could negatively influence learners' perspectives of what is a biased action.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The pernicious effects of bias have been well-documented as threats to EFL learning in the classroom context. As a consequence, questions are raised regarding implicit bias in online EFL learning. In this study, the main manifestations of the implicitly biased teaching practices and the factors that shape them for intermediate-level learners were investigated.

Regarding the first question, it was noticed that based on intermediate level learners' perspectives, implicit biases can either underrate their abilities (micro-assault) or make them feel contempt (micro-insult). Micro-insult behavior triggers learners' strong reactions such as changing their participation patterns or violating the teacher's statement to get their so-called rights. According to DiAngelo (2018), teachers have to confront their personal biases if they aim at creating an inclusive learning environment wherein every learner feels motivated to participate. Staats et al. (2017), however, prescribe doing action research which uproots the origins of the participation problems. In this study, it was noticed that the teacher's claim that no bias was exercised by her in the class was not effective as learners resisted to teacher's explanation in some cases. This confirms the study of (Sue et al., 2007) implying that micro-invalidation or simply pretending that bias doesn't exist in the class will not make the situation better.

Complainant learners believed that the teacher's bias caused her to underrate their linguistic ability and to act differently from their classmates. This finding was also highlighted in the study of (Robinson-Cimpian et al., 2014) describing how implicit bias leads to racialized reactions to school disciplines. Banaji and Greenwald (2013) stated that the mere mention of bias in class results in lower performance levels. Therefore, biased actions should be diminished completely.

Regarding the second question, our data revealed that in most cases, learners had the wrong understanding of being biased the modification of which needs special attention rather than simple denying. Intermediate-level learners, also, used to make negative comparisons doubting the values of their online classmates. This rejects the study of Rezaei et al., (2020) arguing that Iranian EFL learners don't use the negative other representation strategy in their discourse. Finally, in line with the study of Sauro (2009), the online context of learning did not lead to learners' perceptions of being a member of a whole unity. Rather, it increased their feeling of being alone and isolated which triggered their wrong perception of being biased.

This study suffers from some limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the study might limit the generalizability of its findings. Second, the initial explanation of the teacher regarding the logic behind her actions during the term could not prevent learners' false attitudes of being biased. In this way, learners' perceptions of biased teaching practices might be polluted with their own bias. Therefore, more comprehensive plans are recommended to develop a true understandings of rights and bias in online learning. Future research can also focus on other proficiency levels to add to the proficiency-based picture this study aimed at creating. Nevertheless, the researchers believe that this study will be valuable for recognizing online contexts' potentials creating the impression of being biased in the field of EFL learning and allowing for future replications.

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