

## Learners' Preferences in Selecting Language Learning Institute (A Study in Iran)

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**Abstract :** During the previous decade, a significant evolution has occurred in the number of private educational centers and, accordingly, the increase in the number of providers and students of these centers around the world. The number of language teaching institutes in Iran that are considered private educational sectors is also growing exponentially as the request for learning foreign languages has extremely increased in recent years. This fact caused competition among the institutions in improving better services tailored to the students' demands to win the competition. Along with the growth in the industry of education, higher education institutes should apply the marketing-related concepts and view students as customers because students' outlooks are similar to consumers with education. Studying the influential factors in the selection of an institute has multiple benefits. Firstly, it acknowledges the institutions of the students' choice factors. Secondly, the institutions use the obtained information to improve their marketing methods. It also helps institutions know students' outlooks that can be applied to expand the student know-how. Moreover, it provides practical evidence for educational centers to plan useful amenities and programs, and use efficient policies to cater to the market, and also helps them execute the methods that increase students' feeling of contentment and assurance. Thus, this study explored the influencing factors in the selection of a language learning institute by language learners and examined and compared the importance among the varying age groups and genders. In the first phase of the study, the researchers selected 15 language learners as representative cases within the specified age ranges and genders purposefully and interviewed them to explore the comprising elements in their language institute selection process and analyzed the results qualitatively. In the second phase, the researchers identified elements as specified items of a questionnaire, and 1000 English learners across varying educational contexts rated them. The TOPSIS method was used to analyze the data quantitatively by representing the level of importance of the items for the participants generally and specifically in each subcategory; genders and age groups. The results indicated that the educational quality, teaching method, duration of training course, establishing need-oriented courses, and easy access were the most important elements. On the other hand, offering training in different languages, the specialized education of only one language, the uniform and appropriate appearance of office staff, having native professors to the language of instruction, applying Computer or online tests instead of the usual paper tests respectively as the least important choice factors in selecting a language institute. Besides, some comparisons among different groups' ratings of choice factors were made, which revealed the differences among different groups' priorities in choosing a language institute.

**Keywords :** choice factors, EFL institute selection, english learning, need analysis, TOPSIS

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