




SURVIVING ONLINE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE CASE FOR FRENCH LANGUAGE



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ABSTRACT

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Similar to the learning of most languages, French language is initially learnt through a formal one-to-one classroom. However, the pandemic has given both teachers and students teaching/learning French as a foreign language to accept online learning as the new norm. The success of learning French language online depends on several factors. Both teachers and learners play different roles to make the lessons successful and meaningful. This study is done to investigate how online learning presence is influenced by learners' motives to study a foreign language. This quantitative study is done to investigate how learners cope learning French online. 170 respondents were purposely chosen from learners who took French as a foreign language. The survey used has 49 items using 5-Likert scales. Findings revealed interesting information about online teaching and learning of foreign languages. The teacher anchors the online lesson with activities well planned and executed. The teacher takes the bulk of the responsibility to make online learning a success. Once the teacher's and cognitive presence becomes positive, learners can begin to depend on their peers through social presence to maximise the learning experience.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on learning foreign languages online; particularly French. This study explores the need for online presence in the learning of foreign language online.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

According to Allard, Bourdeau, and Mizoguchi (2011) foreign language is an uncommon language communicated by people in a community. Foreign language is also described as a language learned by a person willingly apart from their native language by Álvarez-Sotomayor and Hidalgo-Clérico (2020). Hence, every person's foreign language is not the same as anyone else. Foreign language is also frequently linked with a second language. Despite that, a second language is clearly a different matter as it is a language normally used in a natural environment while a foreign language is a completely unknown language (Sanromán, 2020).

Similar to most lessons, French language is initially learnt through a formal one-to-one classroom. [Wan Mohtar and Awang \(2013\)](#) mentioned that French language has been taught at National Defense University of Malaysia (NDUM) by qualified instructors in respective classrooms. The lesson is preferably taught in full French instead of mixing it with another common language used by students which is English as per Wan Ikhlas's finding. However, now that technology has progressed massively, online learning is starting to emerge as a major learning medium. Hence, learning providers are beginning to develop such platforms. Carnegie Mellon University is one of the learning institutes that developed an online project called Language Online (LOL). This project offers an online French language course that uses intensive use of the internet to their advantage. [Chenoweth and Murday \(2003\)](#) mentioned that LOL is produced to cater students who wish to have a more flexible learning approach.

Online learning becomes an option for learners to study as the internet and technology advance. Students are now able to attend class from any location and at any time of the day without having to constraint themselves with a fixed timetable ([Chamorro, 2018](#)). Meanwhile, learning a foreign language online refers to language learning that happens completely online ([Hockly, 2015](#)). Learning a foreign language comprises the development of four basic skills: listening and reading, also known as the input (receptive) skills, and speaking and writing, the output (productive) skills ([Sousa, 2011](#)). Hockly also stated that learning foreign languages online begin from tertiary education and only commence in lower education level with the advance of technology.

1.2. Statement of Problem

The success of learning French language online depends on several factors. According to [Stoytcheva \(2018\)](#) through her study entitled Students' Perceptions of Online Collaboration in a Distance Learning French Language Course, the success of learning French online depends on the flexibility of methodology, pedagogy and contents such as pedagogical design, learning scenario, learning content and also online tutoring. Online learning encourages students to be responsible and engage in working in groups to enhance new knowledge.

According to [Alabay \(2021\)](#) from his study entitled Students' views on learning French online with Microsoft Teams® during Covid-19 pandemic. Besides benefits, some students think that learning a foreign language online have some problems. The learners felt that face-to-face was needed to practice speaking and reading. The screen in online learning acts as a barrier for effective practices. Nevertheless, online learning is here to stay and many institutions had to be contented with meeting their students online for teaching-learning activities. Hence, this study is done to investigate how online learning presence is influenced by learners' motives to study a foreign language. This study is done to answer the following questions;

1.3. Research Questions

- How does pre actional stage influence online social presence?
- How does actional stage of learners influence online teaching presence?
- How does the post actional stage influence online cognitive presence?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This section discusses the motives for learning foreign languages, learning French online, past studies and also the conceptual framework of the study.

2.2. Motives for Foreign Language Learning

When it comes to motives, there are several reasons why people choose to study foreign language. According to [Johnson \(2017\)](#) more than one billion people are learning foreign languages as of now. These learners share common motives for foreign language learning and it mostly involves communication. One of the motives is to

integrate themselves within a foreign culture. Coming to a country inhabited by foreign language speakers will drive someone to learn a certain language. Besides that, a person could also be motivated to learn in order to integrate with their own culture. This situation happens largely in highly populated countries such as India where the people practice different dialects or languages. Johnson has also mentioned that one of the main reasons for foreign language learning is for educational purposes. Actual students will pursue foreign language especially for those who are furthering studies in a foreign country.

2.3. Learning French Online

There are a variety of ways for teaching French. According to Thomas (2015) there are 4 solid strategies for Teaching French in Modern Classroom: Use Technology, Bland Student's Learning, Flip Your Classroom and Try Gamification. These strategies are appropriate to teach French in this decade when the internet is considered as a learning tool as mentioned by Kamba (2007) in his study entitled The Internet as a Tool for Interactive Learning, Teaching and Research: Nigerian Experience. According to his study, the internet has the power to provide a variety of materials for students.

There can be disadvantages of learning French online. Stoytcheva (2018) on a study analyzing 25 students' opinions in context of a distance learning French language course, found that learning French online can be strenuous and time consuming.

2.4. Past Studies

2.4.1. Past Studies on Disadvantages of Learning Foreign Language Online

There have been many past studies on the disadvantages of learning foreign language online. The study by Maican and Cocoradă (2021) shows that students are having difficulty in using technology be it concerning Internet connection or device related issues. The research focused on online foreign language learning and its correlation with the current Covid 19 pandemic using Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) tool. Respondents of this research consists of 207 self-selected participants from different study programs. Then it is narrowed down to 39 students in search of qualitative results. Participants answered surveys regarding demographic questions including information on age, gender, study program and year of study, foreign languages studied, grade obtained for the foreign language for the first semester of the corresponding academic year. Finding from this research shows that negative associations between FLE and anxiety are consistent with pre-pandemic learning times though there are new findings too such as the higher level of enjoyment with lower-achieving students. Another major disadvantage of learning French online is isolation. E-learning hinders students from having a physical discussion with their teacher nor their classmates. Thus, Nedeva, Dimova, and Dineva (2021) studied on how to overcome disadvantages of e-learning towards 60 students (respondents) from Technical College of Yambol Bulgaria. Instruments used in this particular study include analysis of literature, modern digital technologies and analysis of practical results for the activity students in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). In the end, the study found that applying blended learning which includes elements of web interaction and in person interaction overcomes most of the shortcomings of e-learning.

2.4.2. Past Studies on Advantages of Learning Foreign Language Online

Nevertheless, past researchers have also proved that there are some advantages to learning French online. According to Alabay (2021) some students believe that using a foreign language online is more beneficial than learning it face-to-face. Students felt that learning online is easy as they can watch their recorded lessons as many times as they wished. Besides that, students are confident to ask questions in online class. Some students mentioned that they can access to more materials during online learning as face-to-face learning's material are mostly limited

to hardcopies information. The other benefit is the flexibility of learning a foreign language online due to the fact that online learning allows them to learn wherever and whenever they need.

Alabay (2021) has done research entitled Students' views on learning French online with Microsoft Teams® during Covid-19 pandemic. The participants were 23 students learning French as a foreign language at Galatasaray University, Turkey. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview form. The results showed that students believed that distance learning helped them continue their education during an outbreak, reviewing and taking their courses online if they were unable to attend classes.

Before that Al Tahan (2015) has done his study entitled The impact of a Designed French Online Oral Platform to Improve the French Oral Language Practice for Students in Faculty of Arts French Department. This study was conducted with the questionnaire method. The sample of the study was a group of 32 new students in the faculty of Arts, French department, Cairo University. The results of this study show that the French online oral platform has proven to be effective in improving students' speaking skills. The online oral platform helps solve the problem of lack of exposure to speaking practice in a normal classroom setting. The results of this study also found that students enjoy the use of online oral platforms because of its ease of use. Students consider online platform as a method of learning and a method of sharing information which is through social networks. Students also prefer this platform because it gives them the opportunity to practice their target language anywhere and anytime.

2.4.3. Past Studies on Motivation to Learn Foreign Language

Halim, Abd Rahim, and Mansor (2017) found that the lecturers' role had the most significant effect on the students' motivation in learning French. The mixed methods study which involved 100 students majoring in French at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). In addition to this, the course line, learning environment, peers, examination results, future needs or jobs and self-interest could also influence the undergraduates' motivation.

Another recent study on motivation on learning French was conducted by Giuseppe (2020). The mixed methods research approach is utilized to analyze quantitative and qualitative data to all 209 participants who studied beginner level French at several Australian universities. It has concluded that students continued learning French because they enjoyed their French learning processes and for the love of the language itself. Enjoyable classes and opportunities to communicate in French with native speakers are also important for students to motivate themselves to learn the language.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

Online learning is tough. For many, it is the motive that keeps the students going. The conceptual framework for this study (Figure 1) is rooted from the community of online learning by Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) and motives for learning French by Winke (2005). Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) suggested that there are three main types of presence to look out for during online class and they are (a) Social presence, (b) teacher presence and ©cognitive presence. Firstly, (a) social presence depends on the support the learners get from their peers (although it is online). This support is displayed in Winke (2005) -(i) preactional stage. Next is the (b) teacher presence and this influenced by what the teachers do at the (ii) actional stage. The final presence is © cognitive presence and this is shown at the (iii) postactional stage.

2.5.1. Online Presence

Many are concerned that online learning would deprive learners of some types of presence. According to Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) there are three types of online learning presence. The first type is (a) social presence and it involves a level of connectedness among instructors and students that determines how motivated participants are to take an active role in their own and their peers' meaning-making processes. The second type is (b) teaching presence. Through the design of your online course, facilitation of discourse, and direct instruction,

you establish your online teaching presence. A strong online teaching presence makes for a strong online learning experience and a sense of community for your students. The last type is (c) cognitive presence and it refers to the academic content and engaging of the mind in the online environment. Discussion forums that include meaningful and thought-provoking questions that get students to think and apply the course content. Clear participation guidelines and expectations for students are an important part of the activity

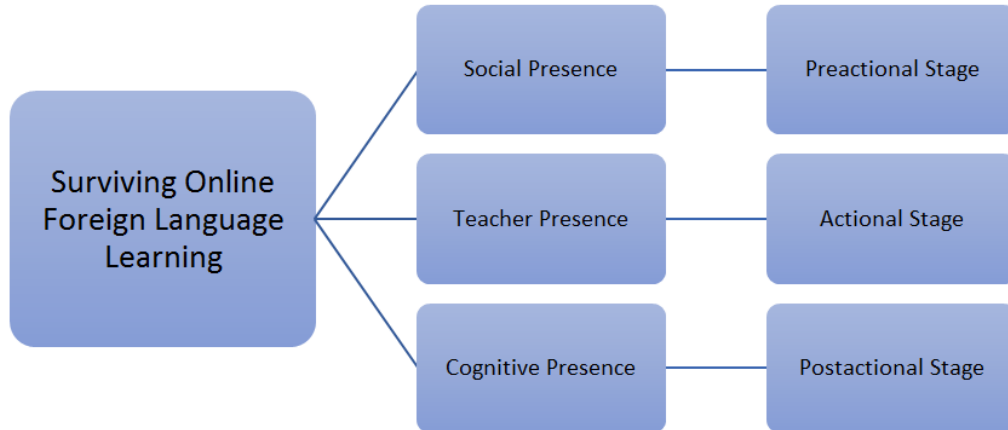


Figure-1. Conceptual framework of the study.

2.5.2. Motives to Learn French

Learners study a course for their own personal reasons. Winke (2005) presented three stages of motivation outlined by Dörnyei (2003). The three stages of motivation consist of (a) preactional stage, (b) actional stage and (c) postactional stage. At the preactional stage, motivation needs to be generated. According to Dörnyei (2003) the generated motivation helps the student select the goal or task to pursue the course. This includes the student's own initial goals, values and attitudes associated with the learning process, perceived likelihood of success, and the support the student gets (both mental and physical). Next at the (b) actional stage, the motivation needs to be sustained. This can be facilitated by the classroom environment, by teachers, peers and/or parents, or by the student through self-regulation during the particular action. This includes classroom-based tasks or the long-term endeavor of learning the foreign language in the classroom. Finally, the (c) postactional stage is achieved when the action (of learning) is completed. The student retrospectively evaluates how things went to help determine the type and quality of activities he or she will be motivated to pursue next.

3. METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to investigate how learners cope learning French online. 170 respondents were purposely chosen from learners who took French as a foreign language. They attended the course in a few public and private universities . The instrument (refer to Table 1) used was a questionnaire adapted from Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) and Winke (2005). The 49 items were asked using a 5-Likert scale survey via goggle form online.

Table-1. Distribution of Items in Instrument.

Constructs	Section		No of Items
Online Learning Presence Garrison and Arbaugh (2007)	A	Demographic Profile	2
	B	Social Presence	9
	C	Teaching Presence	12
	D	Cognitive Presence	12
Motivations for Learning French Winke (2005)	E	Preactional Stage	5
	F	Actional Stage	6
	G	Postactional Stage	5

Table 1 shows the distribution of items in the survey. The survey is adapted from Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) and also Winke (2005) and There are 49 items excluding the demographic profiles. The items are categorised into (1) Online Learning Presence and (2) Motivations for Learning French. Online presence is further divided into social presence (9 items), teaching presence (12 items) and cognitive presence (12 items). Motivations for learning French is sub-divided into preactional stage (5 items), actional stage (6 items) and postactional stage (5 items).Data is analysed using SPSS version 26 to reveal the frequency of responses. Findings are calculated using percentages and mean scores and presented in pie charts and bar charts respectively. Reliability statistics (shown in Table 2) were carried out to the instrument revealing a Cronbach alpha of .966 thus showing a high internal reliability.

Table-2. Reliability Statistics for the Instrument.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.966	49

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This section presents the findings by answering the research questions of the study. The presentation of findings begins with the report of findings for the demographic profile in the form of percentages. The research questions are;

- (a) How does pre actional stage influence online social presence?
- (b) How does actional stage of learners influence online teaching presence?
- (c) How does the post actional stage influence online cognitive presence?

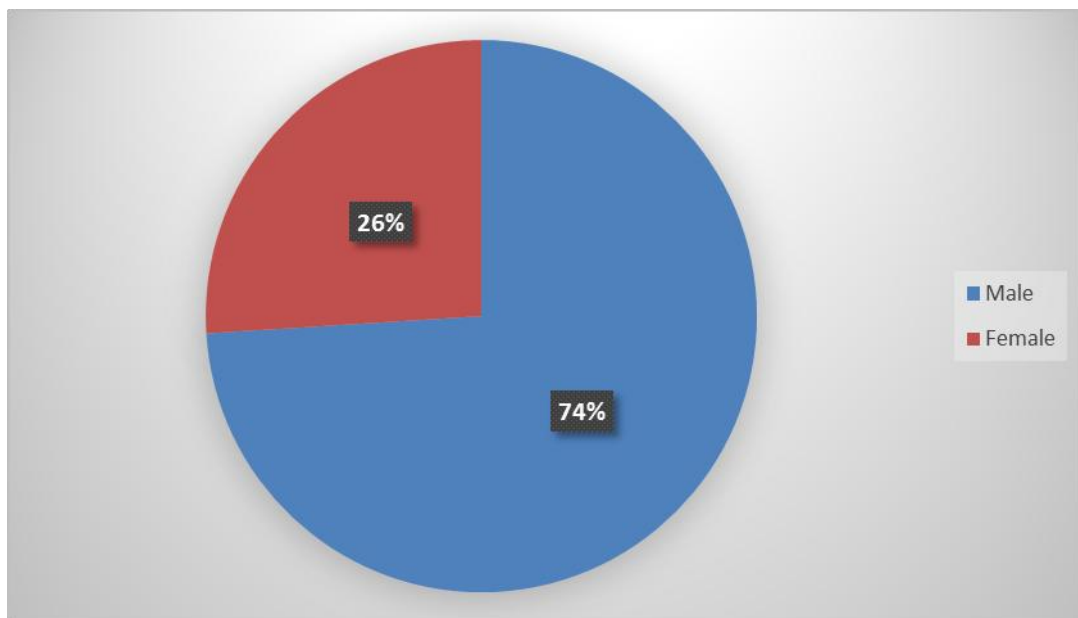


Figure-2. Percentage for Gender.

4.2. Findings for Demographic Profile

4.2.1. Findings for Gender

From Figure 2, it was found that 74% are male respondents compared to 26 % respondents are female.

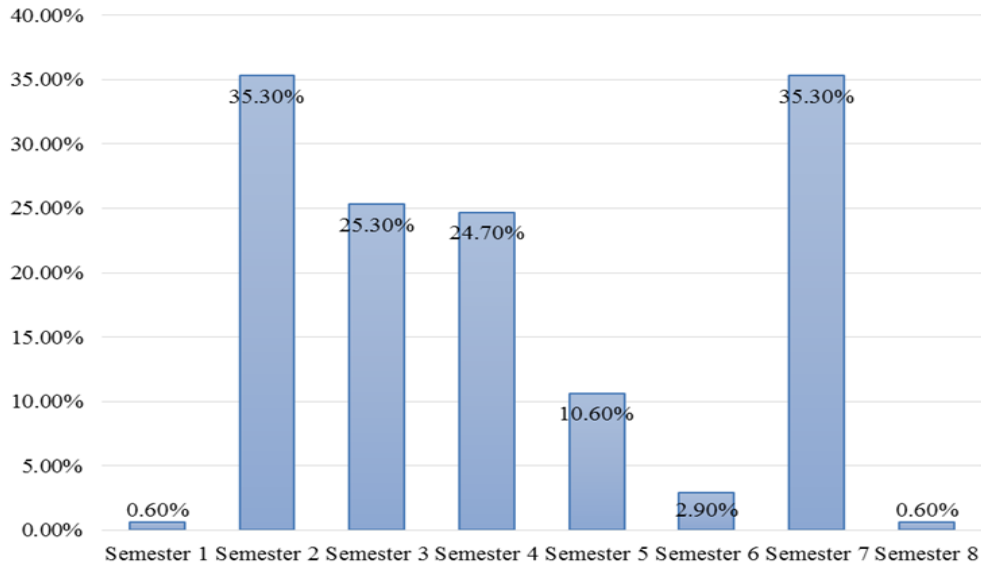


Figure-3. Percentage for Semester.

4.2.2. Findings for Semester

From Figure 3, the most percentage at 35.3% was from the respondents of Semester 2 and Semester 7. Next is the respondents from semester 4 (24.7%) and semester 3 (25.3%). Semester 5 makes up for 10.6% and semester 6 has 2.9%.

4.3. Findings for Preactional Stage

This section answers the first research question: How does preactional stage influence online social presence? At the preactional stage, motivation is activated by the support that the learners get. Social presence acts as a catalyst to the learners' motivation at this initial stage. Findings is presented to show both the influence of (a) social presence and (b) preactional stage in the learning of French online.

(a) Findings for Social Presence

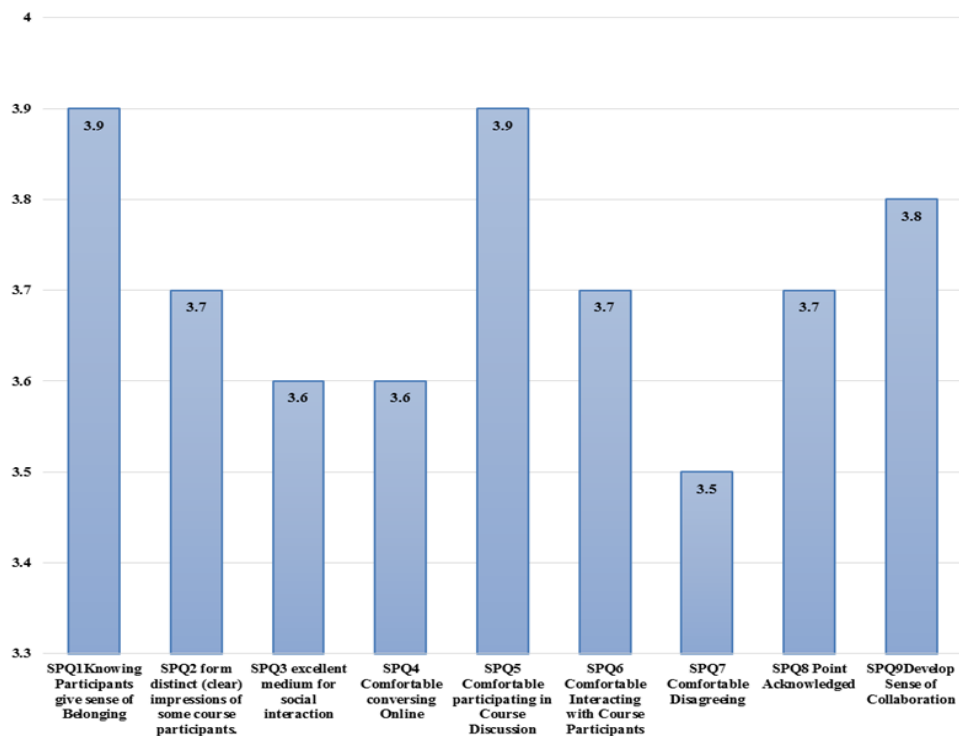


Figure-4. Mean for Social presence.

Figure 4 shows that learners appear to be comfortable participating in course discussion (3.9) and are comfortable to interact with course participants (3.7). On top of that, knowing participants give a sense of belonging to respondents (3.9). However, most learners do not feel comfortable disagreeing during sessions (3.5) nor are they comfortable conversing online (3.6). Besides that, online learning is not deemed to be an excellent medium for social interaction (3.6). Despite that, learners are comfortable participating in course discussion (3.7) and are able to form distinct impressions of some course participants (3.7). Respondents also developed a sense of collaboration (3.8) during online learning while having their point acknowledged (3.7).

(b) Preactional Stage

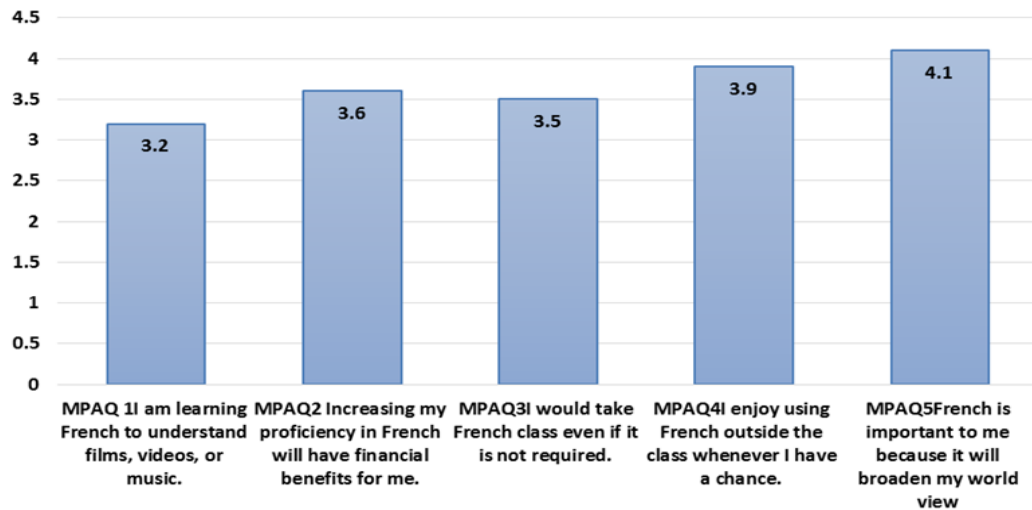


Figure-5. Mean for Preactional Stage.

Based on Figure 5, learners are not heavily inclined to learn French to understand films, videos or music (3.2) despite them wanting to enjoy using French outside the class whenever they have a chance (3.9). Learners also have the intention to take French class even if it is not required (3.5) and want to gain personal financial benefits while increasing their proficiency in French (3.6). Most learners do think that French is important to them as it will broaden their world view (4.1).

4.4. Findings for Actional

This section address the answer to research question 2: How does the actional stage of learners influence online teaching presence? In the context of this study, the teaching presence is enhanced by the activities that the teacher planned. Findings is thus presented by looking at (a) teaching presence and (b) actional stage for learning French online.

(a) Findings for Teaching Presence

Figure 6 shows four (4) the most important roles of lecturer in assisting students during the teaching and learning process. The lecturer provided clear instructions on activities, communicated important data, identified areas of agreement and disagreement and guides class to classify thinking as the most important items related to teaching presence with the higher mean (4.6). While the lowest items such as focus discussion on relevant issues and help to understand strength and weakness with the mean (4.4) is considered not very important.

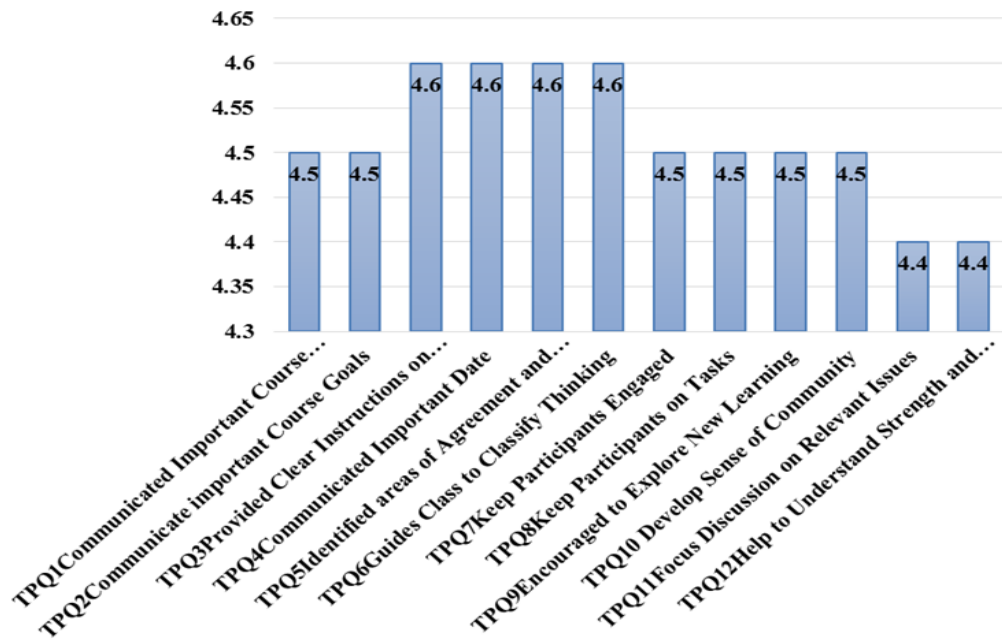


Figure-6. Mean for Teaching Presence.

(b) Findings for Actional Stage

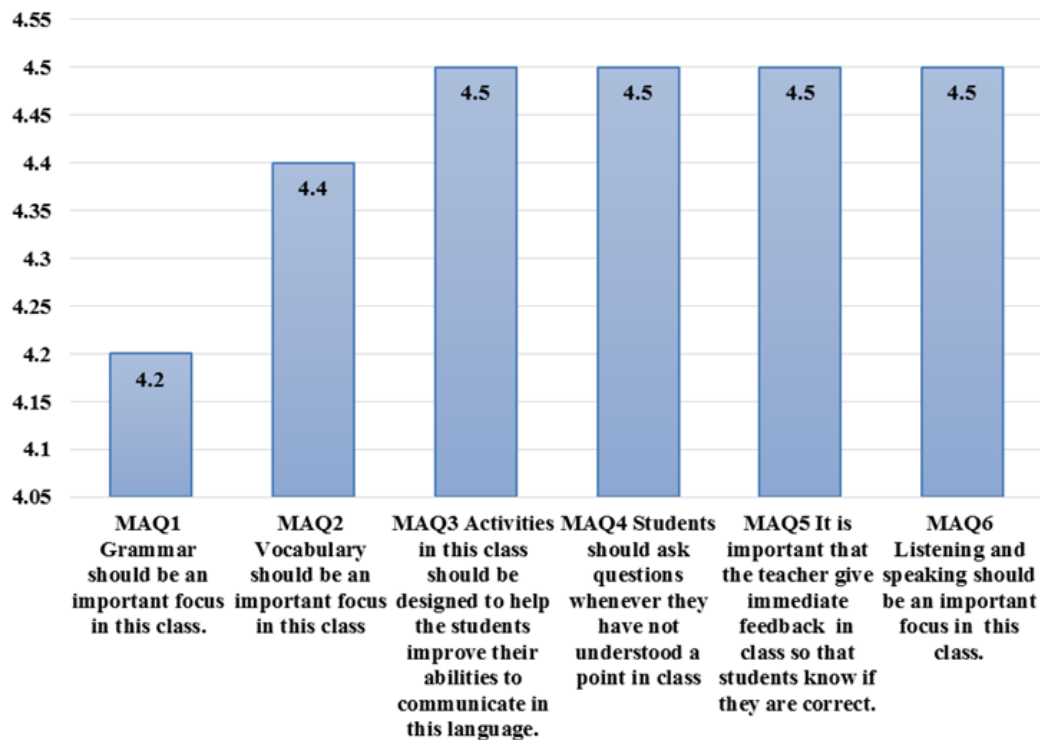


Figure-7. Mean for Actional Stage.

Figure 7 shows the motivation to learn French is influenced by the methodology used and the interaction between lecturers and students during the class. The activities in this class should be designed to help the students improve their abilities to communicate in this language, students should ask questions whenever they have not understood a point in class, it is important that the teacher give immediate feedback in class so that students know if they are correct and listening and speaking should be an important focus in this class. Each showed high mean (4.5). while the lowest item is the grammar should be an important focus in this class (4.2).

4.5. Findings for Post Actional Stage

This section provides an answer to research question 3: How does the post actional stage influence online cognitive presence? At the post actional stage, the student retrospectively evaluates how things went to help determine the type and quality of activities he or she will be motivated to pursue next. This stage is enhanced by the cognitive presence that online learning offers. This section presents findings for (a) cognitive presence and (b) post actional stage.

(a) Findings for Cognitive Presence

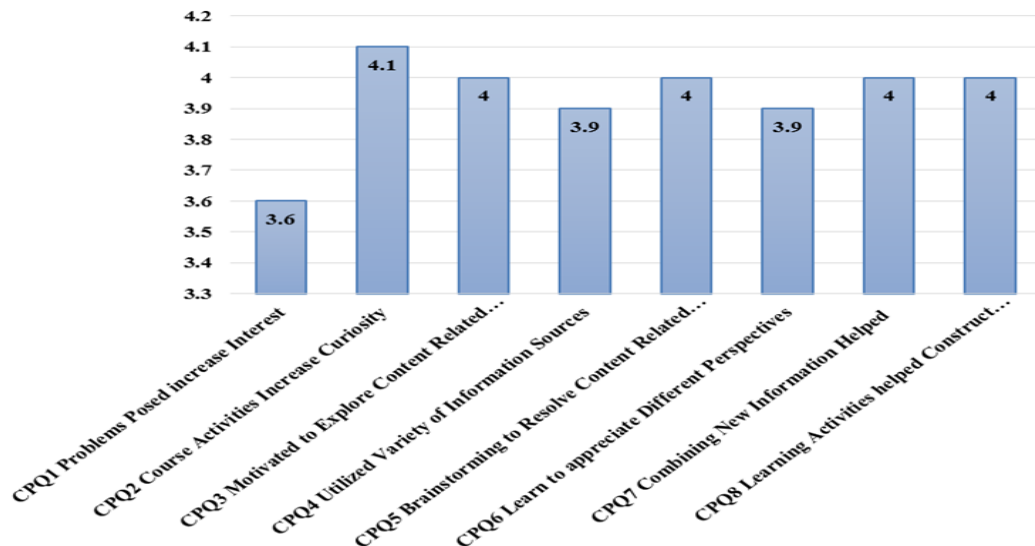


Figure-8. Mean for Cognitive Presence.

Based on Figure 8, it can be concluded that most respondents found the course activities increase their curiosity and at 4.1 and the lowest 3.6 which problems increase interest.

(b) Findings for Postactional Stage

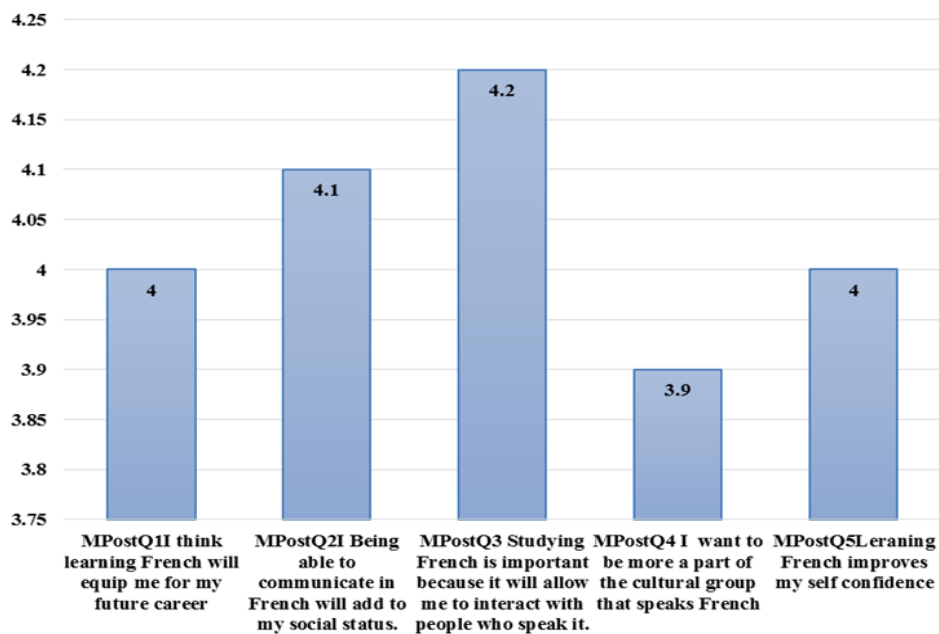


Figure-9. Mean for Postactional Stage.

Based on Figure 9, most respondents found that studying French is important because it will allow them to interact with people who speak it and at 3.9 respondents found that they wanted to be more a part of the culture group that speaks French.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Findings and Discussion

This study has shown interesting findings about learners' perception on different types of presence in learning French as a foreign online. When it comes to social presence, learners felt the opportunity to discuss the course helped them build a sense of belonging towards the course. The collaborative activities increased their preactional stage in motivation towards learning the language. This is also reported by Nedeva et al. (2021) and Halim et al. (2017) who reported similar findings on the influence of having peers throughout the online learning sessions.

Next, when it comes to teacher presence, learners expect clear explanations from the teacher. More so for non-face-to-face classes, learners need to be reminded of important dates relevant to their course. They feel a sense of security when the teacher is present online to clear their agreement and disagreement on areas they have queries on. The activities that the teachers planned helped improved communication via online and allow them to get immediate feedback during the class. The study by Alabay (2021) also reported learners needed the opportunity to check on their understanding as often as they can. Online recorded sessions allowed that to to check for understanding many times if the lectures are recorded. So, the teachers' presence is needed in online classes even if it is recorded.

Nevertheless, in the learning of foreign language, attitude is important so learners can be motivated to continue learning. This study showed that the learners perceived that they gained cognitive presence from the online activities. The activities planned allowed them to increase their curiosity. They became motivated to ask course-related questions. They appreciated the opportunity to brainstorm course-related issues and also combine information in problem-solving activities online. The study by Giuseppe (2020) also showed similar findings reporting that having a positive attitude towards learning a foreign language is important. This attitude helped learners stay on track in learning even if the learning may sometimes be tough.

Table 3 reveals the total mean for presence. With reference to the findings in this study only, the highest presence needed by learners in learning French as a foreign language is (1) teaching presence (mean=4.5). This is followed by cognitive presence (mean=4.3) and the lowest is (3) social presence (mean=3.7). Interestingly, the findings for this study revealed a reciprocal order of total mean scores for the sum of mean for motivation (Table 4) for learning French as a foreign language.

Table-3.Total mean for Presence.

	Total mean for Online Presence	
1	Social Presence	3.7
2	Teaching Presence	4.5
3	Cognitive Presence	4.3

Table-4. Total mean for motivation for learning French.

	Total mean for Motivation for learning French	
A	Preactional Stage	3.7
B	Actional Stage	4.4
C	Postactional Stage	4

The teacher anchors the online lesson with activities well planned and executed. The teacher takes the bulk of the responsibility to make online learning a success. Once the teacher's and cognitive presence becomes positive,

learners can begin to depend on their peers through social presence to maximise the learning experience. The summary of this can be presented in Figure 10.

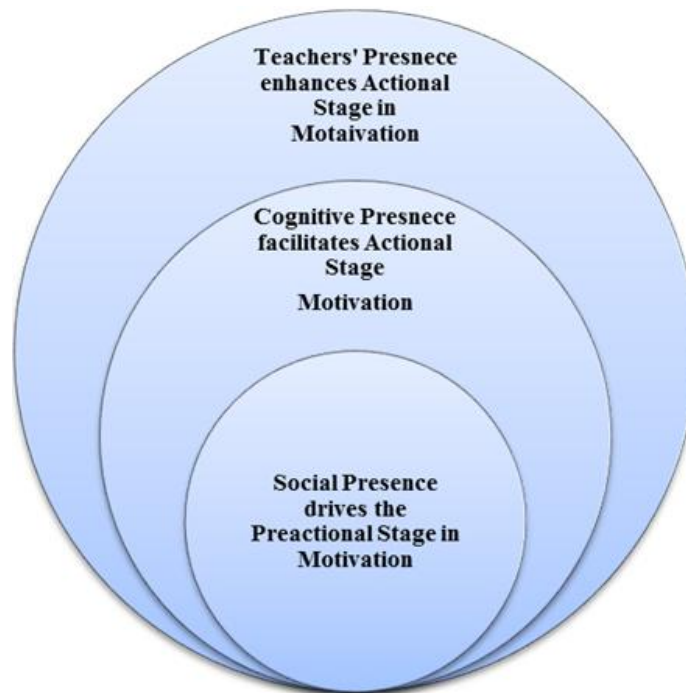


Figure-10. Online Presence and Motivation.

5.2. Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Online learning is here to stay even beyond the pandemic. The pandemic has taught us that the teaching of foreign languages which was found to be fun and effective face-to-face can be as successful online. Hard times make people more creative and so has the pandemic. More institutions are offering the learning of foreign languages online and many learners are maximising their learning via online. Future researchers could look into how different categories of online activities influence the learning of different foreign languages. Interviews can be done to seek an in-depth view of learners (and teachers) on how to make online foreign learning more successful.

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