



TEACHER PRESENCE AS MEDIATOR IN ONLINE LEARNING: THE CASE FOR FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

Fortunately, technology and long entered the education sectors when the world is faced with the pandemic. Whether teachers and learners are ready or not, online classes are here to stay. Online learning is a unique way of learning that allow flexibility at many levels. Language educators once felt that the learning of language can only be done face-to-face because of the needs of some language skills. This study is done to explore the portrayal of presence during online learning of the French as 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. They attended the course in a few public and private universities. The instrument used is a questionnaire. Findings revealed interesting influence of the teacher as mediator in online learning.

Keywords: foreign language, flexibility, online learning, presence, mediator

1. Introduction

As the world begins to benefit for them luxury of technology , the pandemic emerges and forces society to make many types of technological as a necessity. According to Abdullah,

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Rahmat, Zawawi, Khamsah, & Anuarsham (2020), today's advent of the technological era has changed many organizations' needs of communication. This has affected the education sectors. Classes have no choice but to run online. More than ever, the responsibilities of teachers have shifted, maybe even added. Planning non-face-to-face classes can be challenging especially when it come to the teaching of languages. Now teachers need to prepare learners to mentally organised and learn to organise new information or experiences (Rahmat, 2019). Teaching now has entered an era of non-face-to-face methods.

Online learning is a unique way of learning that allow flexibility at many levels. Language educators once felt that the learning of language can only be done face-to-face because of the needs of some language skills. According to Clark and Mayer (2016), online learning, e-learning, distance learning, or non-face-to face learning depends on the computer network technology to transfer information and courses to learners over an intranet or through the Internet. So, language educators have no choice but to incorporate changes in the teaching to fit into the e-learning modes. The E-learning constructs new skills and apprehension related to learners' personal learning aims. One good thing about e-learning is that learning could be synchronously or asynchronously done.

Some say online teaching is similar to face-to-face teaching. Sukimin, Rahmat, Mok, Arepin, Zainal Abidin, & Haron (2021) found that the experiences of both instructors conducting online language lessons and the learners attending online sessions would prove that there are many factors that need to be taken into consideration to make lessons successful. Instructors need to take into three types on interaction in online classes: learner-to-learner, learner-to-instructor, and even learner-to-content interaction. Learners also need to learn to be more responsible to make sure their online learning time is filled with successful learning and interactions. Future research can focus on the experiences of learners as well experiences of instructors teaching language online classes. Hence, Alabay (2021) suggested that more studies should be done to look into the reality of online learning. there is a need to find a deeper understand about learning a foreign language online. This study is done to explore the portrayal of presence during online learning of the French as a foreign language. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- 1) How is social presence portrayed in French online classes?
- 2) How is teaching presence portrayed in French online classes?
- 3) How is cognitive presence portrayed in French online classes?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mediation Process in Online Classes

Welcoming new things in the online classroom needs careful planning by the teacher. Mediation processes (Figure 1) occur between the stimulus (content of the lessons) and response (learners' responses). According to Bandura (1977), the mediation processes in social learning theory is described as the 'bridge' between traditional learning theory

(i.e., behaviourism) and the cognitive approach. One important aspect of cognitive approach is the use of selective attention during online classes. In online classes, the teacher has to plan activities so that the learners' attention is solely focussed in the lesson and not on other aspects of the internet.



Figure 1: The Mediation Process (Source: Bandura, 1977)

2.2 Past Studies

Past studies have been done to show the success of learning foreign languages online. The study by Erkan (2017) was done to determine the effects of learning vocabulary in French as a foreign language (FFL) through internet-based study. This study used a mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach. 85 Turkish university students (in 20-23 ages) participated in this study. A vocabulary test and a semi-prepared interview form are prepared to collect the data for this research. Findings showed that students studying vocabulary using internet-based research improved their French language knowledge easily and efficiently. Next the study by Chenoweth and Murday (2003) was done to see if there were significant differences in achievement, satisfaction, and time spent on the course in face-to-face and online courses. Multiple measures were taken from students' background. This includes the language and technology experience, and also individual difference in learning styles. Findings revealed that the only statistical difference was that students who studies online outperformed the offline students.

Studies have also been done to show the role of technology in learning. The study by Sukimin, Rahmat, Mok, Arepin, Zainal Abidin, & Haron (2021) investigated the mediational process in online learning. 111 respondents who were diploma, bachelor degree and postgraduates participated in this quantitative study. The instrument used is a questionnaire with 29 items. The items looked at the influence of online language learning on learners. The results show that there is a significant difference in the education level. Findings also revealed that the support from peers play an important role as it prevents students from dropping out of the course. In addition to that, it was also reported that the students preferred teaching style that involves active participation. Another study by Alabay (2021) investigated how technological developments have made online learning tools become a part of educational process. The Covid-19 pandemic has made them a necessity. Learning a foreign language with the help of e-learning software is a debatable subject of 21st century. Microsoft Teams® is one of this software and understanding its effect on learning a foreign language is worth studying. Thus, this study aims to understand students' views on learning French online with Microsoft

Teams. The design of this study is the case study. The participants were 23 students learning French as a foreign language. The data were gathered through semi-structured interview form and the data were analyzed through content analysis. The results of the study reveal three themes on this subject. These themes are the reality of distance learning, the user friendliness of Microsoft Teams, and learning a foreign language online. With these themes, this study tries to compose a deeper understanding about learning a foreign language with a popular software.

The use of technology has helped in the teaching of foreign languages. The study by Lustyantje & Syaefudin (2017) investigated the use of information technology to teach French as a foreign language. This quantitative study was done with 300 respondents. Research findings show that French Teaching involves the use of ICT, especially computer application that is used as a media to help students master the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Findings showed that 8% of students always use ICT, 8% of students often use it, 43% of students sometimes use it, and 9% of students seldom use it. The remaining 10% of students said they had never used ICT.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

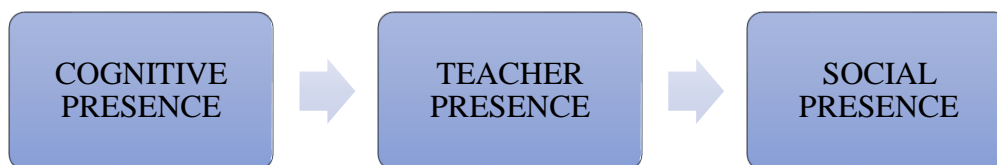


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study:
Teacher Presence as Mediator in Online Learning

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of the study. In order to disseminate information and share knowledge and to provide Cognitive Presence, the Teacher's Presence needed to plan activities to maximise learning. Well-planned collaborative activities allow learners to maximise their peers' Social Presence.

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 & Arbaugh (2007). The 33 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
	A	Demographic Profile	2
Online Learning Presence Garrison & Arbaugh (2007)	B	Social Presence	9
	C	Teaching Presence	12
	D	Cognitive Presence	12

Table 1 shows the distribution of items in the survey. The survey is adapted from Garrison & Arbaugh (2007) 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). 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 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
.957	33

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;

- 1) How is social presence portrayed in French online classes?
- 2) How is teaching presence portrayed in French online classes?
- 3) How is cognitive presence portrayed in French online classes?

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.

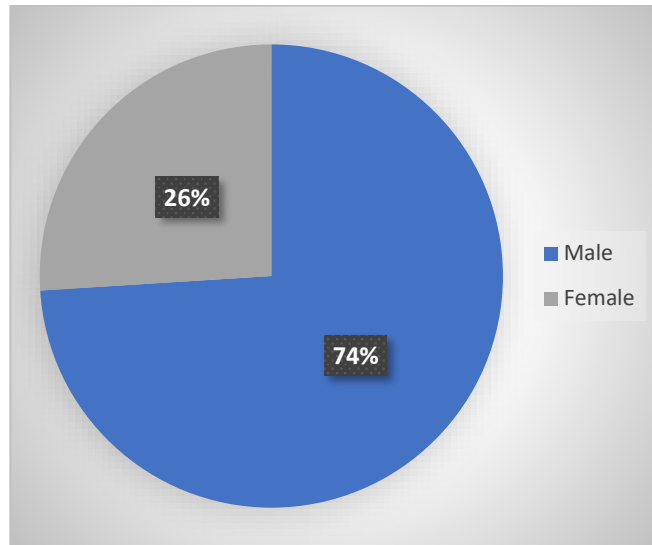


Figure 2: Percentage for Gender

5.2.2 Findings for Semester

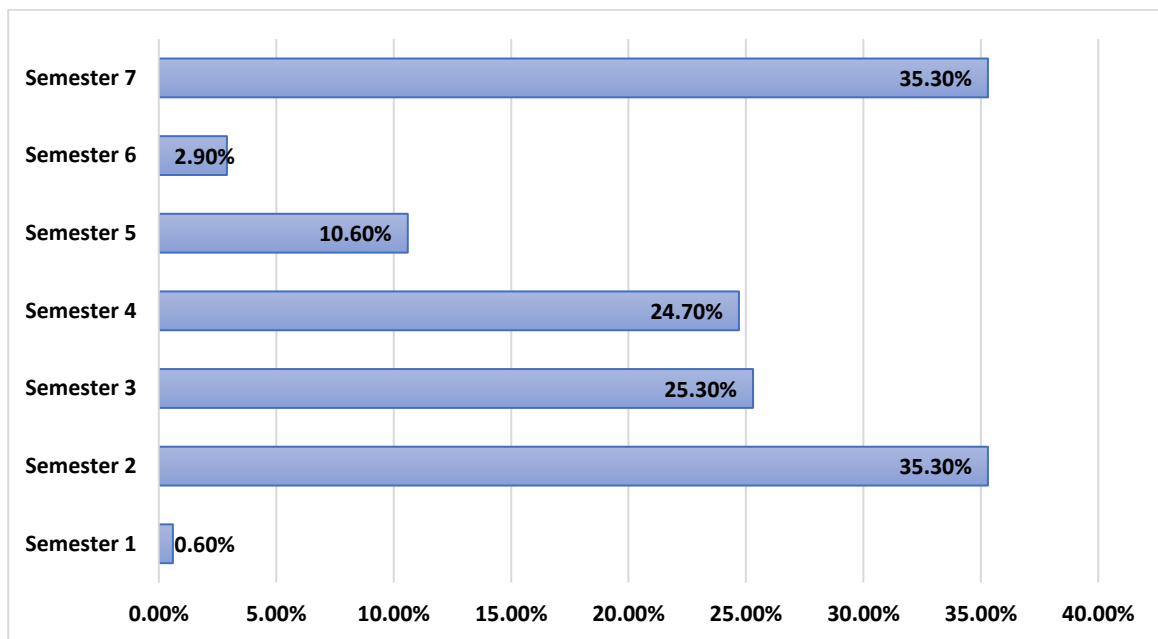


Figure 3: Percentage for Semester

From Figure 2, the highest percentage is at 35.3% 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 Social Presence

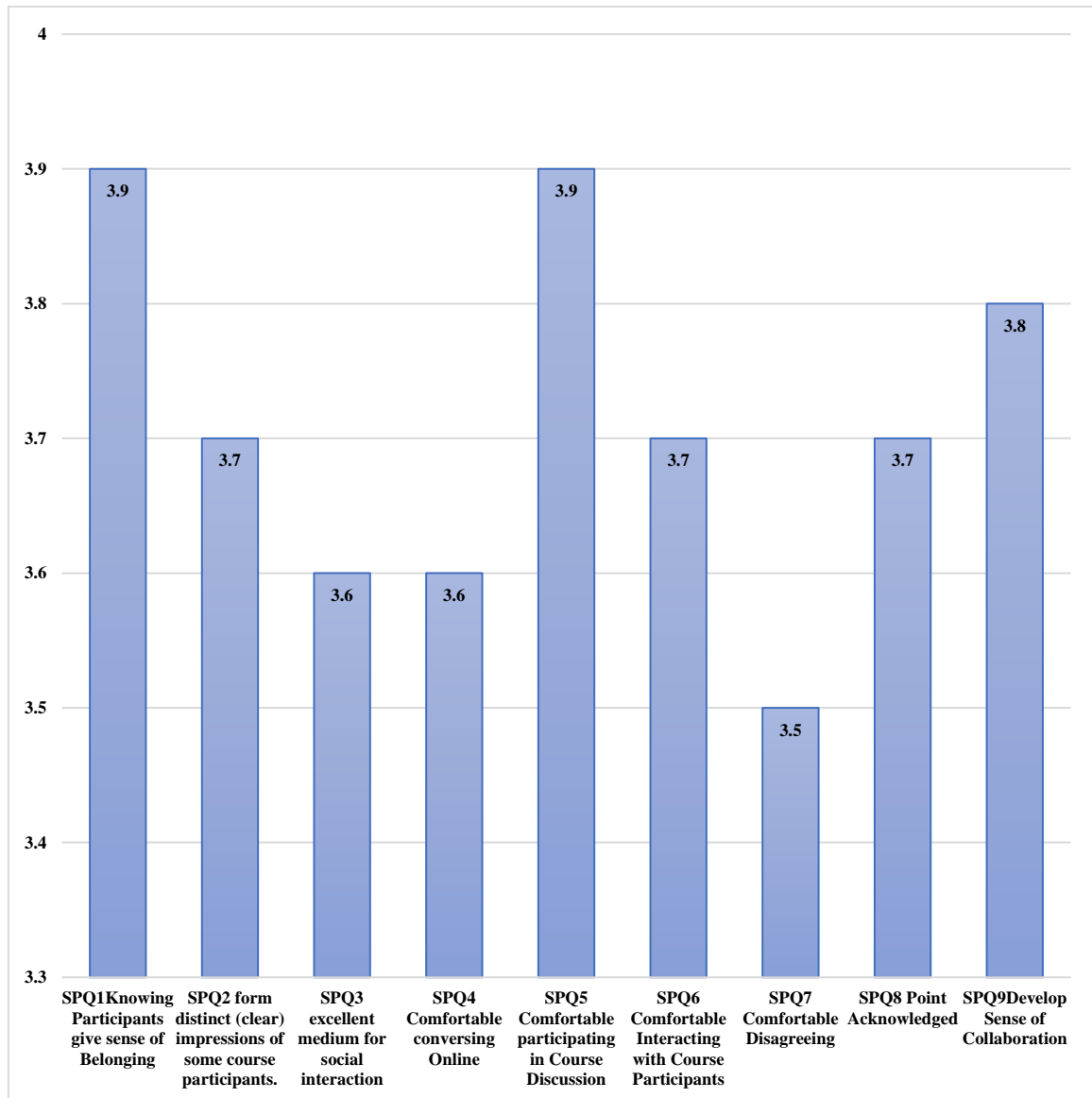


Figure 4: Mean for Social presence

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).

4.4 Findings for Teaching Presence

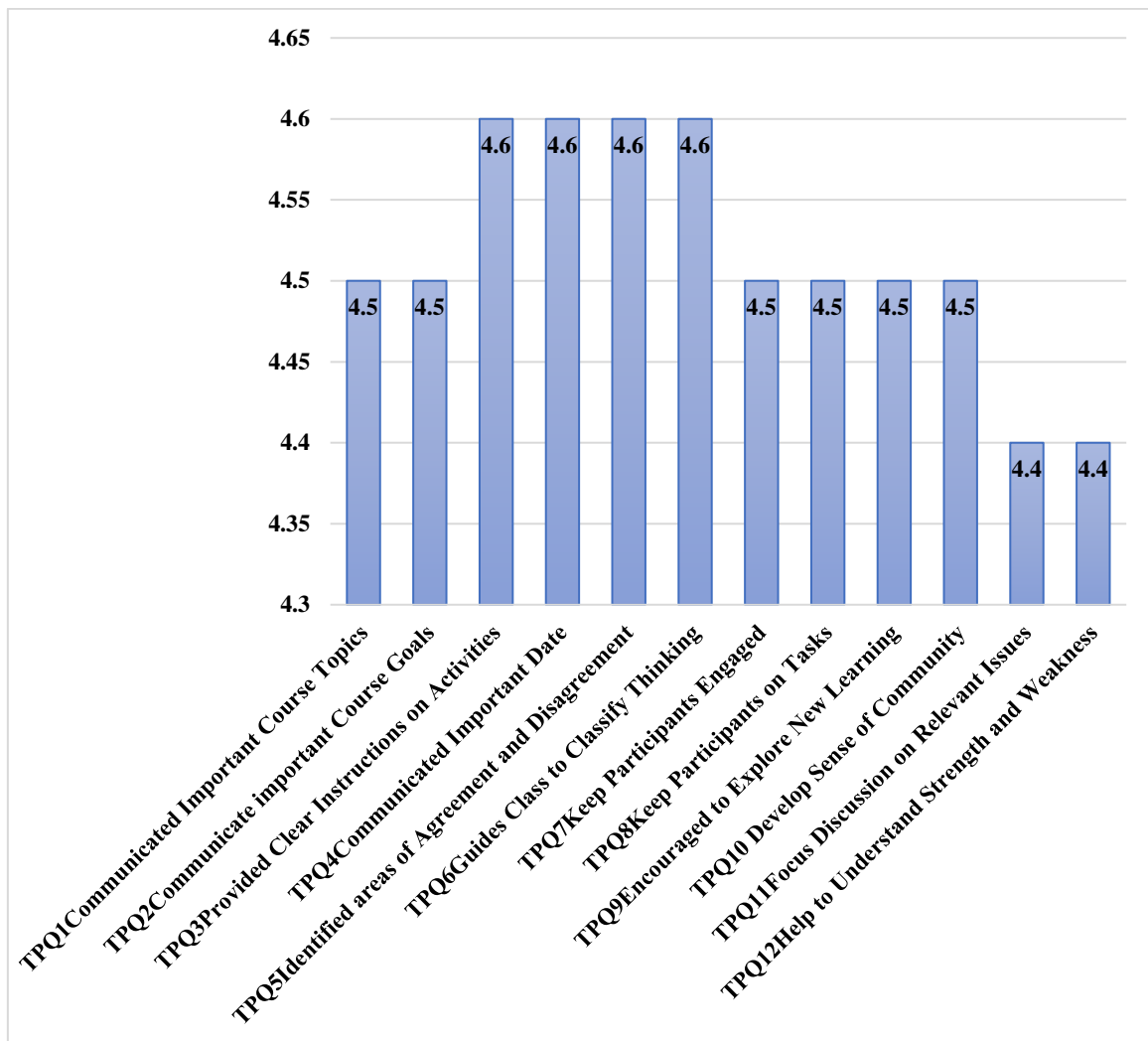


Figure 5: Mean for Teaching Presence

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.

4.5 Findings for Cognitive Presence

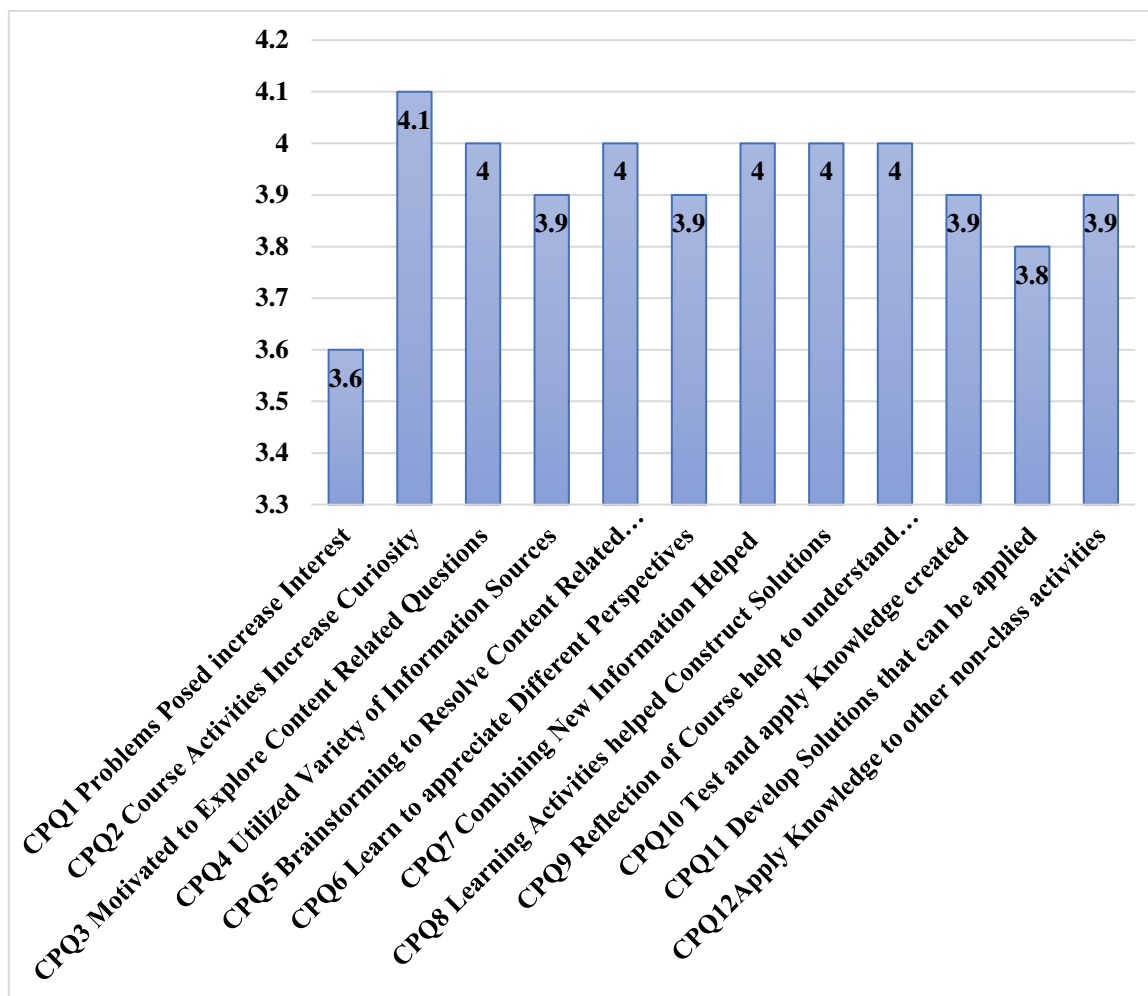


Figure 6: Mean for Cognitive Presence

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

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussion

The data in this study revealed some interesting findings. Learners feel that by participating in the online class activities helped them feel a sense of belonging towards the class as a community. This feeling can help them perceive learning as a natural process. According to Erkan (2017), the feeling of belonging helped improved the learning in the online classes. In addition to that, respondents reported that more than ever in online learning, they need guidance from the language teacher. The needed clear instructions so they could gain direction. This is also agreed by Lustyantje & Syaefudin (2017) who also reported that online language learners needed guidance so they can stay

focussed in the course. Finally, the respondents also reported that they needed the activities to be interesting so they would be curious to learn more. This is important so learners can sustain their interest to complete the course. The study by Sukimin, et al. (2021) also found that the online presence is needed to make sure learners do not drop out of the course.

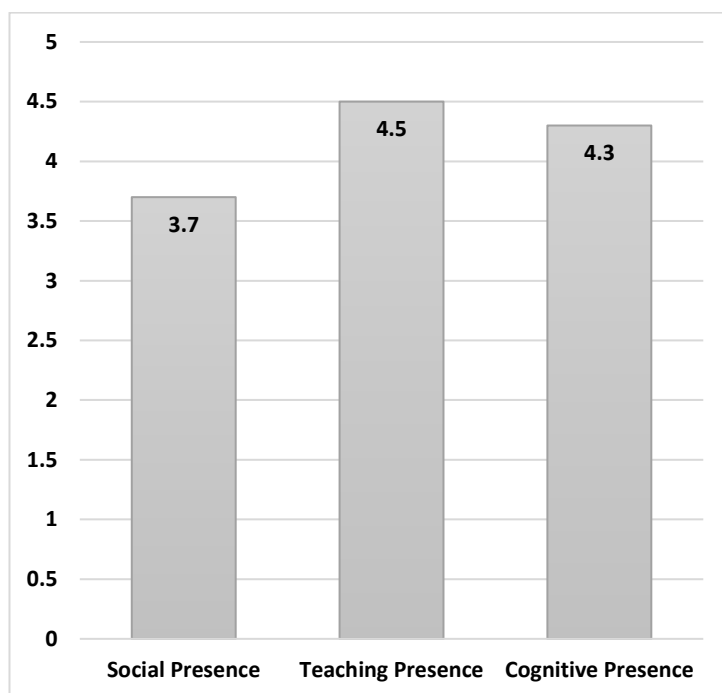


Figure 7: Total means for Online Presence

Figure 7 reveals the summary of mean scores for all type of online presence investigate in this study. In the context of this study, the highest sum of mean is for teaching presence. Next is the cognitive presence and the lowest sum of mean is social presence. This means more than ever; online leaning depends on the teacher to make careful planning for students to gain maximum benefit from the online class. The careful planning by the teacher can create a meaningful cognitive presence suitable for learning. Learning is later enhanced through the leaners' social interaction online.

Pedagogically, the teacher holds the "main key" to the online classes. It is up to the teacher to make sure learners get maximum presence especially during online classes. Future researchers could investigate how learners react to different type of activities or even different styles of online teaching.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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