The Influence of Teaching Presence in Online Classes

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a quantitative examination of online presence within Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) class, focusing on the impact of teaching presence on both social and cognitive presence in addressing learner needs. The findings underscore the interrelated roles of teaching presence (TP), social presence (SP), and cognitive presence (CP) as foundational components for fostering effective and meaningful learning experiences in online language education. This quantitative study is conducted to explore types of presence in online learning. A convenient sample of 381 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey. Overall, the findings of these studies support the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, highlighting the importance of balancing cognitive, social, and teaching presences to create engaging and successful online learning environments. By leveraging the interconnectedness of TP, SP, and CP, instructors can significantly enhance student engagement and potentially reduce dropout rates.

Keywords: Online Presence, Mandarin As A Foreign Language, Teaching Presence, Social Presence, Cognitive Presence

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed pedagogical practices, particularly in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. The widespread adoption of online platforms has enabled learners from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds to access language education, thereby broadening opportunities for developing both linguistic and intercultural competence. According to Liu (2022), Mandarin programs in the United States have shifted their courses online, thereby expanding their recruitment scope to include students from other regions and even other countries.

Within the context of online learning, one of the most influential frameworks guiding research on teaching and learning processes is the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model, developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) and later refined by Garrison and Arbaugh (2007). The CoI framework identifies three interdependent elements—teaching presence (TP), cognitive presence (CP), and social presence (SP)—as critical components shaping the quality of the online educational experience. Among these, TP—defined as "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007)—serves as the foundation that supports and sustains the other two presences.

TP is particularly important in language learning contexts, where learners often face challenges in comprehension, interaction, and engagement due to the linguistic and cultural complexities of the target language. Prior research has shown that effective instructional design and facilitation by the instructor fosters learner confidence and motivation, which in turn enhances active participation and achievement (Rahmat et al., 2021). Furthermore, TP plays a mediating role in shaping learners' CP, which refers to their ability to construct

meaning through reflection and discourse, as well as SP, which involves developing interpersonal connections and a sense of community in the online classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community of Inquiry (CoI)

Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) have provided a comprehensive review of research related to the CoI framework in online learning. They discussed the framework's three core components—SP, CP, and TP—and how they interact in online education. The article also highlighted challenges and issues in studying the CoI and suggested future research to improve the model for understanding effective online learning.

Rahmat et al. (2024) studied how social support, expectancy, and value motivate students learning online. They surveyed 156 Malaysian public university students and found that instructor support and feedback are crucial for student engagement. Learners also tend to have high expectations for their instructors and feel confident in their abilities. Social support strongly relates to both expectancy and value, suggesting that good social connections help online language learning.

Teaching, Cognitive and Social Presences

Past researches collectively underscore the multifaceted dynamics of online learning, emphasizing the interplay among cognitive, social, and teaching presences within the CoI framework. Central concepts include TP, which encompasses instructional design, facilitation, and direct guidance to foster engagement and knowledge construction (Faulconer et al., 2022; Li, 2022; Li & Wang, 2024); SP, acting as a mediator to enhance relational bonds, emotional support, and community-building, thereby mitigating isolation in virtual environments (Mutezo & Maré, 2023; Yoon & Leem, 2021; Sudarnoto et al., 2025); and CP, involving critical thinking, exploration, and resolution of ideas, often influenced by self-efficacy, metacognitive self-regulation, and co-regulation (Lasekan et al., 2024). Additional pivotal ideas emerge around learning motivation and engagement, categorized into cognitive (e.g., perceived value and expectancy), emotional (e.g., wellbeing and psychological capital), and behavioural dimensions (e.g., persistence and interaction), with factors like intrinsic/extrinsic orientations, task value, and environmental support (e.g., family, technology, and course design) playing critical roles (Li, 2024). Lee et al. (2022) further emphasize that higher levels of cognitive presence are closely associated with deeper cognitive engagement and improved learning outcomes in online environments. Their findings highlight that students who demonstrate stronger cognitive presence exhibit enhanced analytical thinking and knowledge construction, underscoring the importance of fostering cognitive engagement in digital learning contexts. Moreover, wellbeing is portrayed as a holistic outcome influenced by motivation, interpersonal relationships, and attitudes toward online learning, though direct links to platform attitudes remain tenuous (Sudarnoto et al., 2025). CP within the CoI framework, which includes Triggering Event, Exploration, Integration, and Resolution always ideally follows a logical sequence, however CP categories may not always unfold ideally, highlighting their role in guiding the inquiry process. (Shea & Rice, 2023). Sustainable online education highlights barriers such as technological infrastructure and student demographics, advocating for interactive designs and rapid feedback to sustain engagement (Lasekan et al., 2024). Predictive models like SEM-ANN reveal non-linear relationships, where TP and online interactions forecast learning presence, especially in foreign language contexts (Li & Lau, 2025). Finally, connectivism integrates these elements by viewing knowledge as networked, urging adaptive strategies in digital ecosystems (Wang et al., 2025). These concepts collectively advocate for balanced presences to optimize online learning efficacy, retention, and psychological health.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the role of TP in Mandarin as a Foreign Language (MFL) online class, particularly its relationship with cognitive and social presence. This study is conducted to explore types of presence in online learning. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following research questions:

RQ1 How does teaching presence influence online learning?

RQ2 How does social presence influence online learning?

RQ3 How does cognitive presence influence online learning?

RQ4 Is there a relationship between teaching presence and all types of presence in online learning?

By situating the research within the CoI framework, this study extends the work of Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) and provides empirical insights into how TP can be optimized to improve learning outcomes in online Mandarin language education.

METHODOLOGY

This study is replicated from the study by Garrison & Arbaugh (2007) who presented three main types of presence in online class. The first type of presence is TP. This refers to the teacher/instructor's planning of the flow of the lessons. This planning determines the success or failure of the class. The next type of presence is CP. This type of presence refers to the educational setting that the learners are in during the online session. This session should allow learners to learn actively and construct meaning. The last type is SP. This type of presence refers to the feeling of connectedness among the learners. The learners need to feel the presence of their peers even in online classes. Additionally, this study also explores if there is a relationship between TP and CP. This study also investigates if there is a relationship between TP and SP.

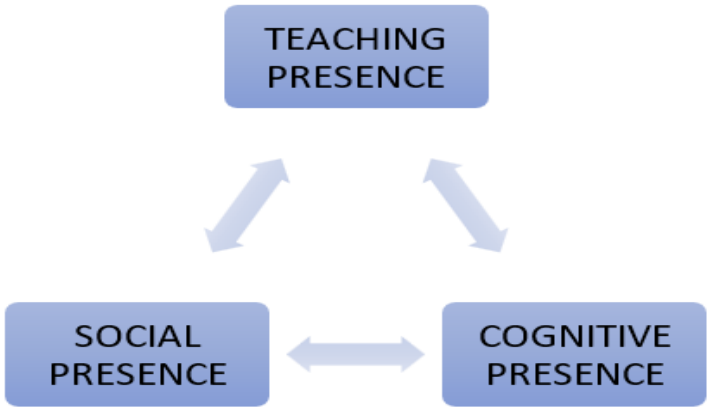

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study:

The Influence of TP on all types of Presence

This quantitative study is conducted to explore types of presence in MFL online learning. A convenient sample of 381 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey. Table 1 below shows the categories used for the Likert scale; 1 is for Never, 2 is for Rarely, 3 is for Sometimes, 4 is for Very Often, and 5 is for Always.

Table 1 Likert Scale Use

1	Never
2	Rarely
3	Sometimes
4	Very Often
5	Always

Table 2 shows the distribution of items in the survey. This study is replicated from Garrison & Arbaugh (2007) to reveal the variables in table 3 below. Section A has 12 items on TP, and Section B has 9 items on SP, meanwhile Section C has 12 items on CP.

Table 2 Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	TYPE OF PRESENCE	NO OF ITEMS	Cronbach Alpha
A	TEACHING	12	.955
B	SOCIAL	9	.929
C	COGNITIVE	12	.953
	TOTAL ITEMS	33	.968

Table 2 also shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .955 for TP, .929 for SP and .953 for CP. The overall Cronbach Alpha for all 33 items is .968; thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen (Jackson, 2015). Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings for Teaching Presence (TP)

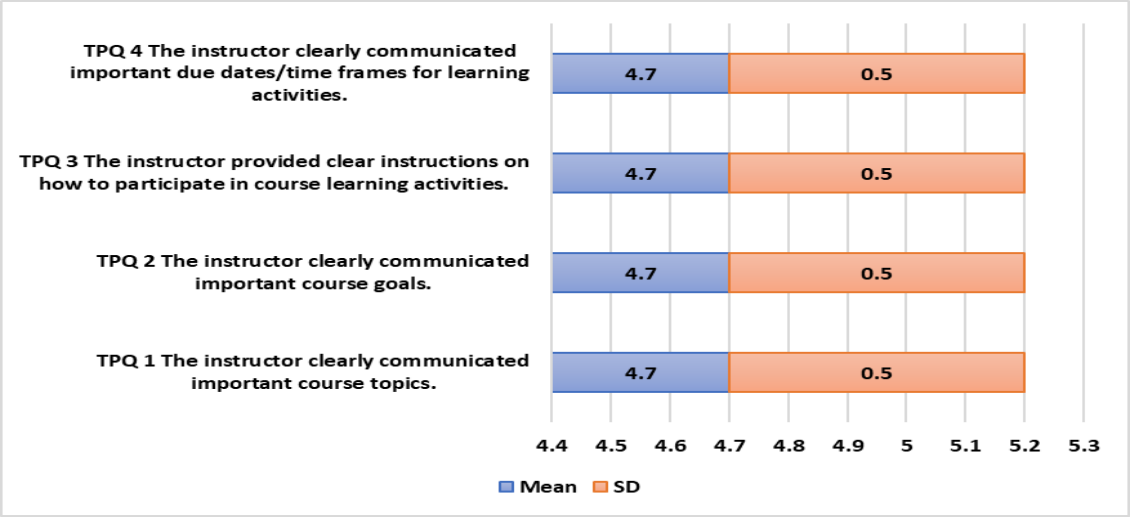

Figure 2 Mean for Design and Organization

Figure 2 displays the mean scores for the design and organization dimension. All four items—TPQ1 through TPQ4—achieved the highest possible average in this set (M = 4.7), with a consistent standard deviation (SD = 0.5). This uniformity reflects a strong consensus among students that the instructor communicated course topics, goals, participation requirements, and deadlines with exceptional clarity.

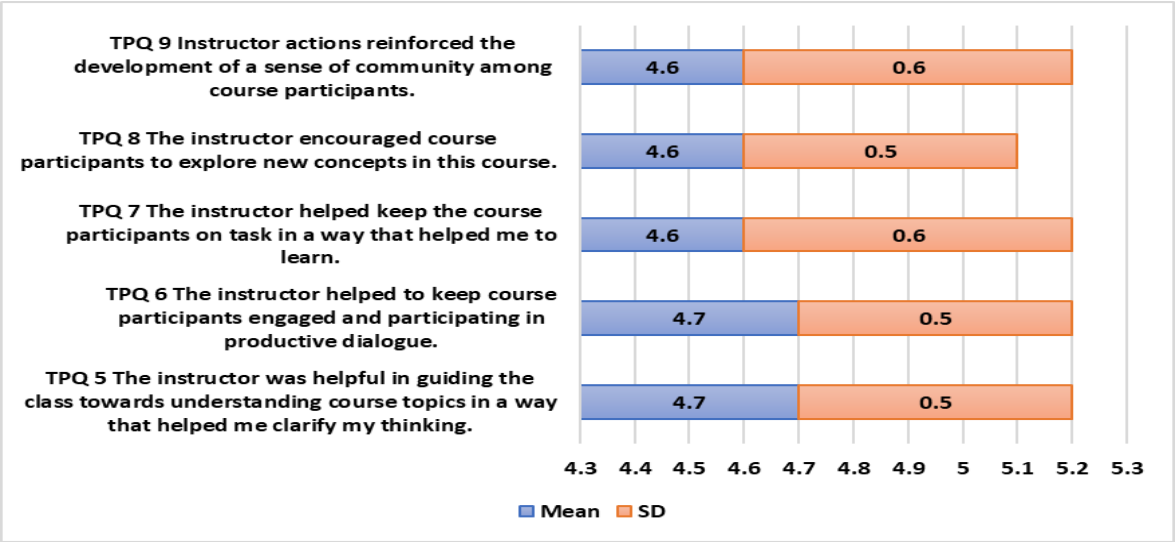

Figure 3 Mean for Facilitation

Figure 3 presents the mean scores for the facilitation dimension. The highest ratings (M = 4.7, SD = 0.5) were assigned to TPQ5 and TPQ6. These results indicate that students valued the instructor's role in promoting conceptual clarity and sustaining interactive participation in the online MFL classroom. TPQ7 and TPQ8 followed closely with high mean scores (M = 4.6, SD = 0.6 and SD = 0.5 respectively), reflecting strong perceptions of the instructor's ability to maintain focus while fostering intellectual curiosity. The lowest mean score, TPQ9 was slightly lower at M = 4.6, SD = 0.6. While still high, this score suggests a small opportunity to further enhance community-building within the online learning environment—an aspect particularly relevant to second-language learning, where social interaction and peer connection are vital for language acquisition and confidence-building.

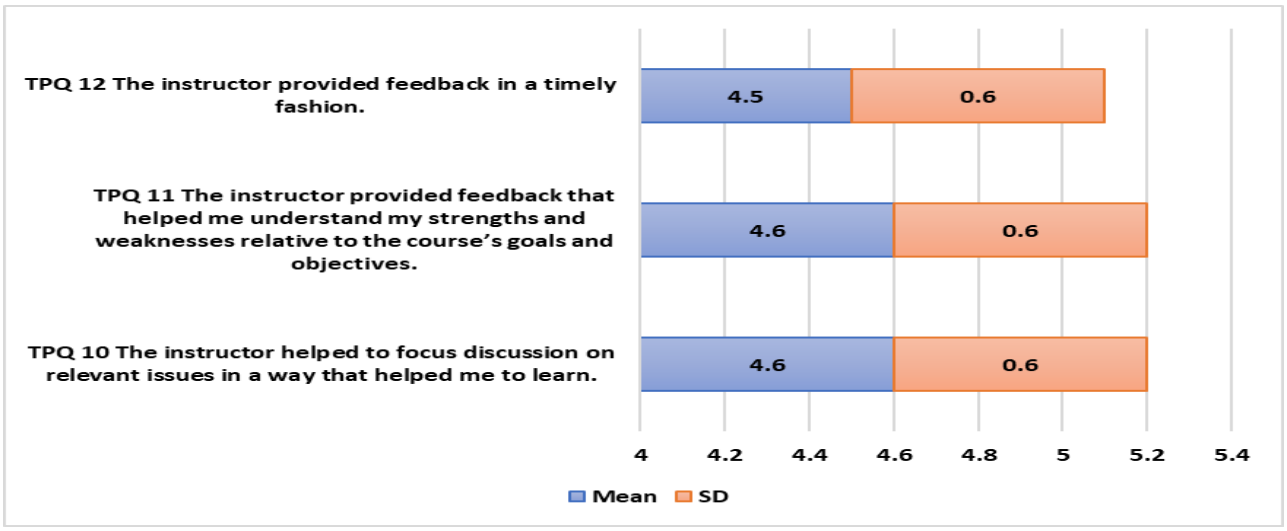

Figure 4 Mean for Direct Instruction

Figure 4 presents the mean scores for the direct instruction. TPQ10 to TPQ12 demonstrates mean values of 4.5 to 4.6, with standard deviations of 0.6, suggesting that instructors were effective in focusing discussions, providing feedback, and doing so promptly.

The findings from the Teaching Presence Questionnaire reveal consistently high mean scores across all items, indicating a strong perception of TP among the respondents.

Findings for Social Presence (SP)

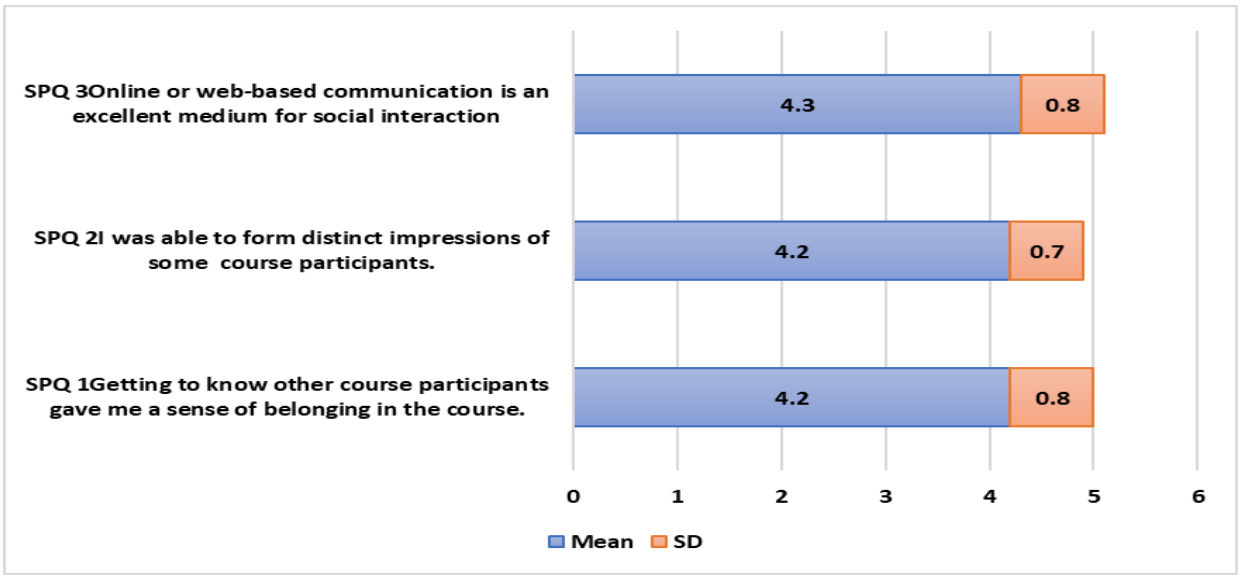

Figure 5 Mean for Affective Expression

From Figure 5, considering the items related to affective expression, the mean scores range from 4.2 to 4.3, with standard deviations between 0.7 and 0.8. Affective expression items reveal high mean scores, with values

ranging from 4.2 to 4.3 and standard deviations between 0.7 and 0.8. These findings suggest that participants perceive the online learning platform as a positive environment conducive to collaborative learning.

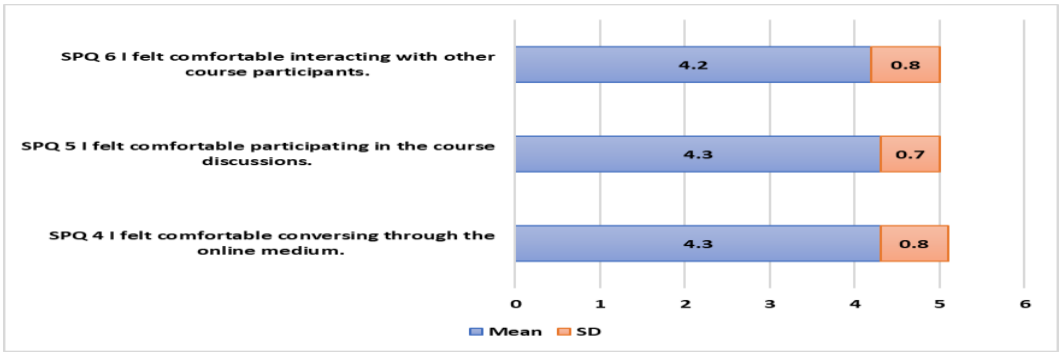

Figure 6 Mean for Open Communication

Figure 6 presents the mean scores for the open communication. The mean scores are consistently around 4.3, with standard deviations ranging from 0.7 to 0.8. These findings suggest that respondents generally found the online platform to be a comfortable and accessible medium for communication and discussion. The data indicate positive perceptions of open communication, with mean scores ranging from 4.2 to 4.3 and standard deviations from 0.7 to 0.8.

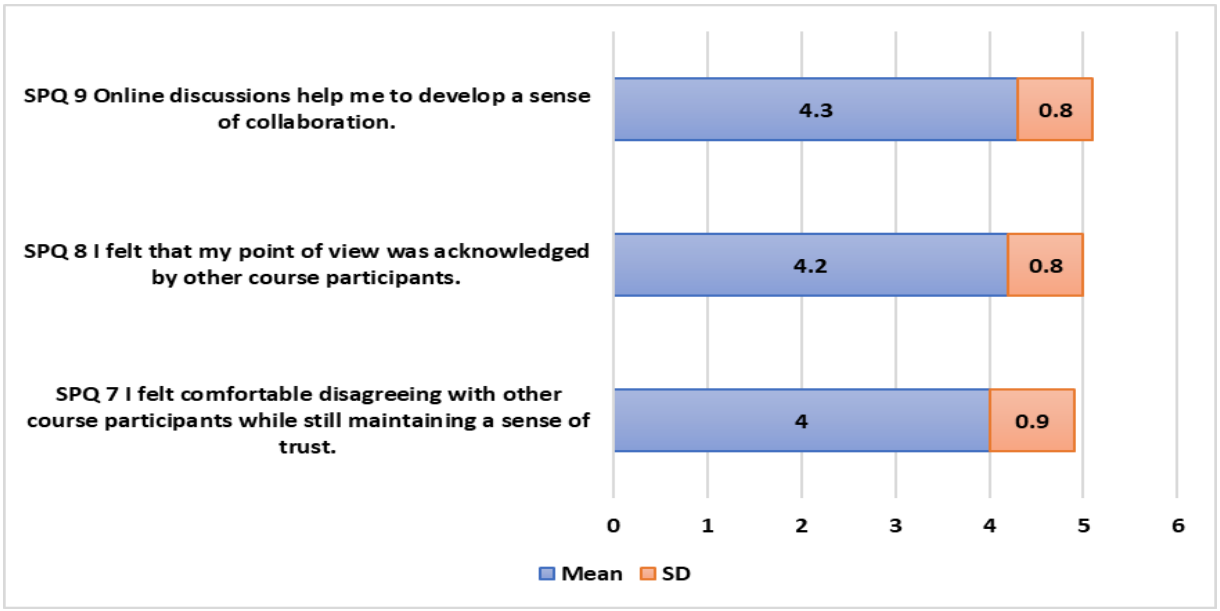

Figure 7 Mean for Group Cohesion

Figure 7 presents the mean scores for the group cohesion dimension of SP indicating consistently high ratings across all three items (M = 4.0–4.3, SD = 0.8–0.9). Participants reported feeling comfortable expressing disagreement while maintaining trust (M = 4.0), acknowledged by peers (M = 4.2), and that online discussions fostered collaboration (M = 4.3). These findings suggest that the course effectively promoted a sense of community and collaborative engagement, though opportunities remain to further encourage open expression of differing views.

From Figure 4, 5, and 6, it is evident that students generally feel comfortable expressing themselves, communicating openly, and forming connections with their peers, which are all vital for an effective online learning environment.

The responses to the Social Presence Questionnaire indicate moderately high levels of SP among course participants. Open communication within the online environment fosters a sense of comfort and accessibility (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). Instructors who offer strong support can significantly boost students' motivation to learn and their satisfaction with the learning experience (Fowler, 2018).

Findings for Cognitive Presence (CP)

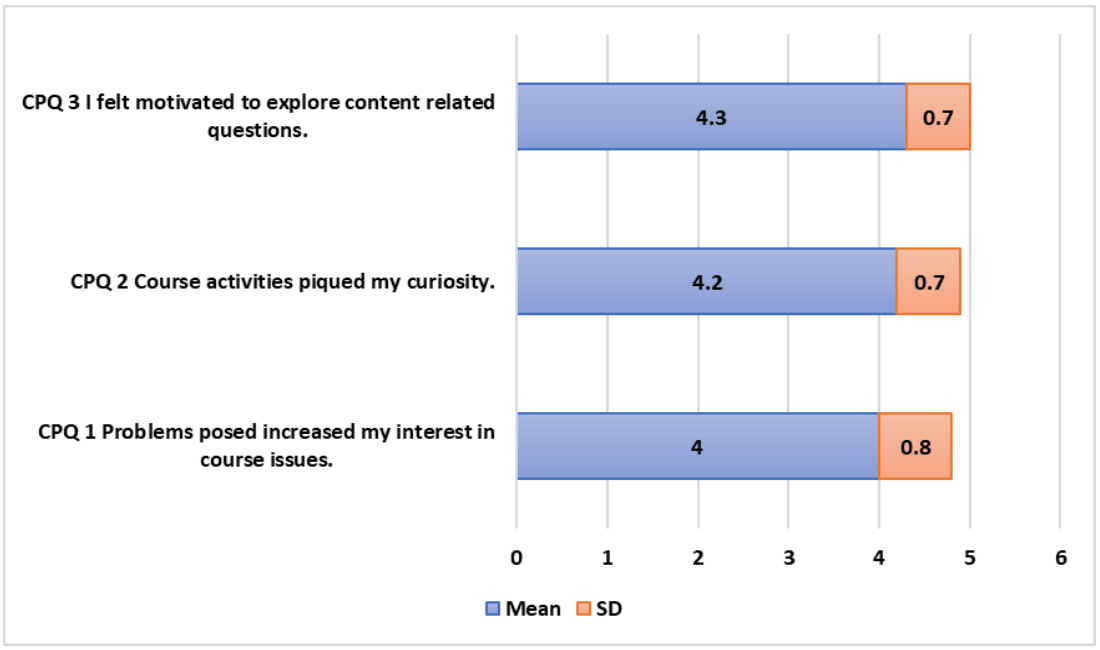

Figure 8 Mean for Triggering Event

Figure 8 presents the mean scores for the triggering event dimension of CP indicating high levels of learner engagement across all three items (M = 4.0–4.3, SD = 0.7–0.8). Participants agreed that problems posed during the course increased their interest in course issues (M = 4.0), that course activities stimulated their curiosity (M = 4.2), and that they felt motivated to explore content-related questions (M = 4.3). These findings suggest that the course design effectively initiated the inquiry process by capturing learners' attention and fostering intrinsic motivation to engage with the content.

Figure 8 indicates that the triggering event phase, which involves stimulating curiosity and interest in course issues, receives mean scores between 4.0 and 4.3, with standard deviations ranging from 0.7 to 0.8.

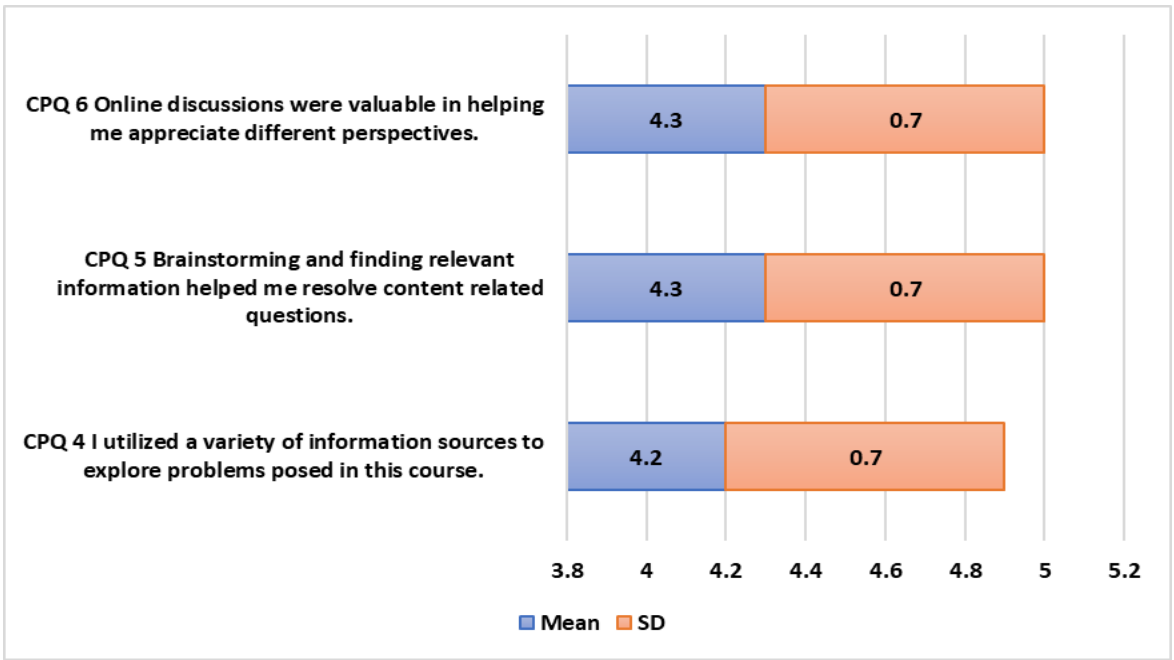

Figure 9 Mean for Exploration

Figure 9 presents the mean scores for the exploration, which entails utilizing diverse information sources and engaging in brainstorming to address content-related questions, yields mean scores between 4.2 and 4.3, with standard deviations of 0.7.

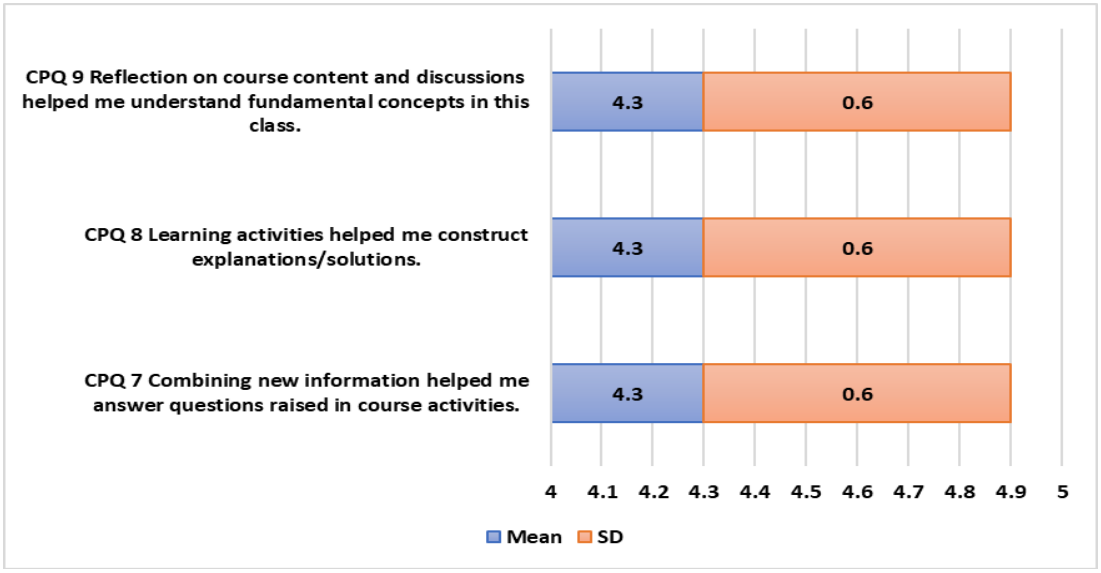

Figure 10 Mean for Integration

Figure 10 presents the mean scores for the integration, which involves combining new information and constructing explanations or solutions, exhibiting mean scores of 4.3, with standard deviations of 0.6.

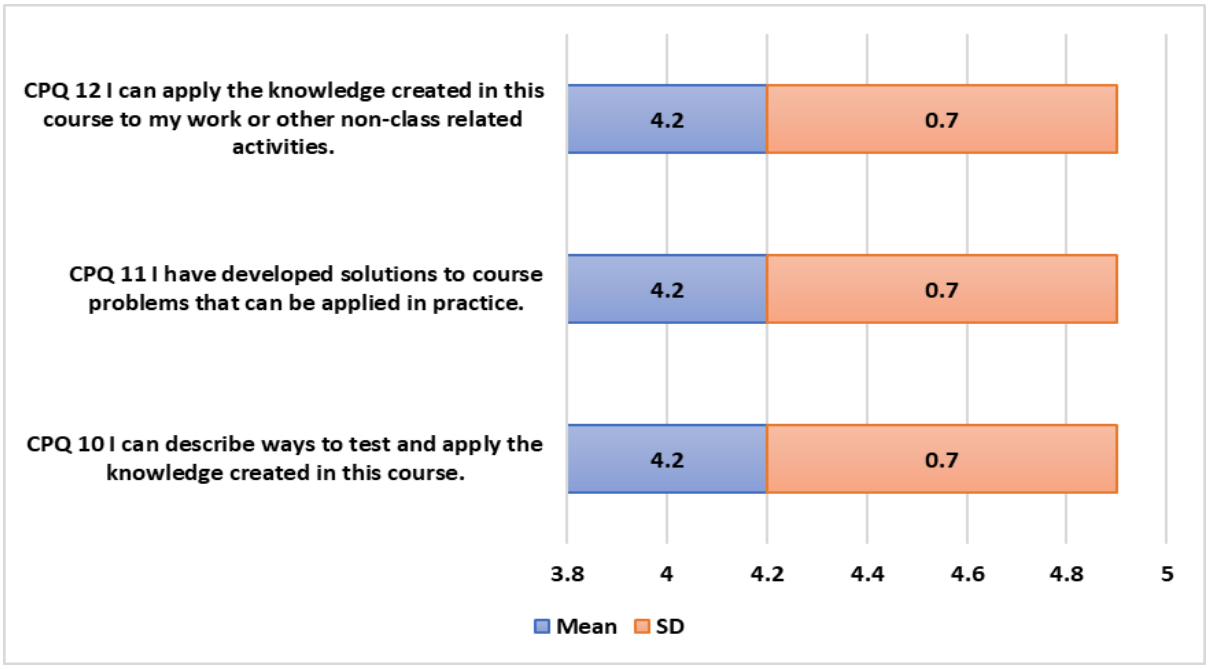

Figure 11 Mean for Resolution

Figure 11 presents the mean scores for the resolution, which involves applying the knowledge created in the course to practical situations, demonstrating mean scores of 4.2, with standard deviations of 0.7.

For CP, the means for Triggering Event (4.0-4.3), Exploration (4.2-4.3), Integration (4.3), and Resolution (4.2) are consistently high, with low standard deviations (0.6-0.8), indicating a strong cognitive engagement among course participants.

The data suggest that students were consistently engaged in exploring course content, integrating new information, and developing solutions applicable in practice. The mean values for each item in the Cognitive Presence Questionnaire are consistently high, ranging from 4.0 to 4.3, indicating that students generally find the course activities engaging and helpful in constructing knowledge. The relatively high mean score for Instructor Support suggests that instructors effectively adapted to provide support in the online classroom, potentially influencing student motivation positively (Fowler, 2018).

Findings for relationship between TP and all types of presence in online learning

Table 3 Correlation between Teaching and Cognitive Presence

		TEACHING	COGNITIVE
TEACHING	Pearson (Correlation	1	.600**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	381	381
COGNITIV E	Pearson (Correlation	.600**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	381	381

**Correlation is significant at the level 0.01(2-tailed)

Table 3 shows there is an association between TP and CP. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between TP and CP (r=.600**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between TP and CP.

Table 4 Correlation between Cognitive and Social Presence

		COGNITIVE	SOCIAL
COGNITIV E	Pearson (Correlation	1	.741**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	381	381
SOCIAL	Pearson (Correlation	.741**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	381	381

**Correlation is significant at the level 0.01(2-tailed)

Table 4 shows there is an association between CP and SP. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between CP and SP (r=.741**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between CP and SP.

Table 5 Correlation between Social and Teaching Presence

		SOCIAL	TEACHING
SOCIAL	Pearson (Correlation	1	.607**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	381	381
TEACHING	Pearson (Correlation	.607**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	381	381

**Correlation is significant at the level 0.01(2-tailed)

Table 5 shows there is an association between SP and TP. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between SP and TP (r=.607**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between SP and TP.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that the instructor demonstrated a very high level of TP in the online learning environment. The instructor's clear communication of course topics, objectives, and deadlines, together with effective guidance, timely feedback, and the ability to foster engagement, community, and focused discussion, indicate that students perceived the instructor as highly organized, supportive, and responsive. Overall, these results suggest that teaching presence exerted a strong positive influence on the quality of online learning, enhancing students' understanding, participation, and sense of connection within the virtual classroom. This finding is consistent with the results of Mutiga and Alhazani (2024) and provides a direct answer to RQ1.

The findings also reveal that students experienced a high level of SP in the online learning environment. The positive responses across all indicators suggest that students felt a strong sense of belonging, comfort, and mutual respect when interacting with their peers. They were able to communicate effectively, express differing opinions constructively, and engage in collaborative discussions that fostered meaningful social connections. Overall, the findings demonstrate that SP positively influenced students' online learning experiences by strengthening interaction, collaboration, and a sense of community. This outcome aligns with Yoon and Leem (2021), who found that SP significantly enhances group cohesion and efficacy in virtual learning environments. Similarly, the present findings suggest that when learners perceive a strong sense of SP, it fosters trust, collaboration, and mutual support, thereby improving both the social and academic outcomes of online learning. This conclusion provides a direct response to RQ2.

In terms of CP, the findings indicate that students exhibited a high level of cognitive engagement in the online learning environment. The strong agreement across all indicators suggests that students were intellectually stimulated by the course content and activities, actively explored and applied new knowledge, and engaged in reflection and problem-solving processes that deepened their understanding of course concepts. The results further demonstrate that students were able to integrate and apply newly acquired knowledge to real-world contexts, reflecting the development of higher-order thinking skills. Overall, these findings indicate that CP positively influenced students' learning outcomes by promoting critical thinking, problem-solving, and knowledge construction. This conclusion aligns with the findings of Lee et al. (2022), who demonstrated that higher levels of CP are strongly associated with improved learning performance and deeper cognitive engagement in online learning environments. Consistent with their study, the present results underscore the importance of fostering CP to enhance students' analytical thinking, reflective learning, and overall academic achievement, thereby effectively addressing RQ3.

Moreover, the results revealed a strong positive relationship among all three presences within the CoI framework, specifically between TP and CP, CP and SP, and SP and TP. These findings suggest that an instructor's teaching presence plays a pivotal role in cultivating both cognitive engagement and social interaction, thereby creating a more cohesive and dynamic online learning environment. This result is consistent with Singh et al. (2022), who emphasized that the CoI framework, when supported by technology-enabled tools, facilitates the development of social, cognitive, and teaching presence, fostering critical thinking, inquiry, and meaningful discourse between students and instructors. Similarly, Qing and Diamantidaki (2021) highlighted the significance of teacher–student interaction and the sense of presence in enhancing the quality and meaningfulness of online language learning experiences, particularly in remote and virtual classroom contexts. Furthermore, the ceiling effects observed in certain aspects of the CoI dimensions underscore the need for continued exploration into advanced pedagogical approaches that can further differentiate and enrich student experiences in already highly engaged learning settings. This finding aligns with Shea and Rice (2023),

who noted that teaching presence significantly influences both social and cognitive presence, collectively shaping the overall effectiveness of the online learning environment. Overall, these findings affirm that the interrelationship among teaching, social, and cognitive presence is crucial in fostering meaningful, interactive, and high-quality online learning experiences, thereby addressing RQ4.

The findings of these studies also support the CoI framework, highlighting the importance of balancing cognitive, social, and teaching presences to create engaging and successful online learning environments. In blended learning settings, research indicates that both TP and CP have evolved to incorporate social elements (Armellini & Stefani, 2015; Lasekan et al., 2024).

The outcomes of this study offer significant pedagogical insights for instructors and curriculum developers engaged in online MFL learning settings. For instance, instructors ought to prioritize embedding interactive components within their online MFL courses, transitioning from didactic lectures to more dynamic and participatory approaches to boost student engagement (Lasekan et al., 2024).

The research findings also offer a thorough examination of the CoI framework within the domain of online MFL learning, highlighting the interconnectedness of TP, SP, and CP. From a pedagogical perspective, these insights are particularly relevant in the post-pandemic landscape, where blended learning approaches necessitate adaptable strategies to sustain linguistic proficiency (Jelińska & Paradowski, 2021). The emphasis on TP as the orchestrator of course structure, facilitation, and direct instruction indicates that instructors should prioritize structured support, such as timely feedback and scaffolded activities, to address issues like linguistic and cultural barriers and a lack of engagement in asynchronous settings (Li, 2022; Oh et al., 2018). This perspective aligns with connectivism, which advocates for networked interactions to bridge individual understanding with collaborative digital tools, thereby enhancing communicative skills among MFL learners.

Future investigations should delve deeper into how the specific technological capabilities of online platforms interact with the development of cognitive, social, and teaching presences across different foreign language learning scenarios. Additionally, it is imperative to identify and refine optimal strategies for balancing these presences to maximize the greatest possible learning outcomes, given that the complex and nuanced interplay among the three presences in online learning settings demands further exploration to pinpoint effective pedagogical approaches (Mutiga & Alhazani, 2024).

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