French Language Students' Perception of Online Learning during Post-COVID-19

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Abstract: Following the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia, the country initiated the relaxation of the Movement Control Order (MCO). Despite the reversion to face-to-face instruction, online learning, or e-learning, continues to be employed in all university institutions. Therefore, in response to this gap, this study focused on the perception of 30 French language students towards online learning post-COVID-19 at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). Data were collected using a 7-sections questionnaire. Descriptive analysis showed that the students preferred recorded class sessions, quizzes, or assignments. They perceived online classes as very structured and similar to face-to-face learning, with a consensus of 0.64. Students also felt that online learning can increase their self-discipline and responsibility. These findings suggest significant implications for the future of educational delivery, including the potential for enhanced student engagement and satisfaction through the integration of recorded sessions, structured breaks, and frequent assessments. This study concluded that the perception of French language students towards online classes post-pandemic is positive.

Keywords: Benefits of online learning, COVID-19, French language, online learning, perception

Introduction

With the global spread of the new virus COVID-19, many countries have ordered the immediate closure of all educational institutions. In a highly socialized community such as universities, educational institutions have ceased operations for extended periods of time during the spread of the virus in order to protect the health of their students from virus exposure. During the spread of the virus, in early February 2020, only schools were closed in China and a few other affected countries (Muthuprasad et al., 2021). According to Muthuprasad et al. (2021), by the middle of March, however, nearly 75% of countries around the world had implemented or announced the closure of educational institutions. Nonetheless, in a relatively short period of time, COVID-19 has become a catalyst for educational institutions around the world to pursue a creative approach. Most universities have now used Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or other online platforms to conduct online learning.

In Malaysia, educational institutions are now required to give instruction using online platforms, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic has begun (Romli et al., 2023). Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is crucial to online education, particularly in the background of the COVID-19 outbreak. Typically, educators employ programs like Telegram, Google Classroom, Google Meet, and so forth to help them in their teaching. However, elements like environmental conditions and internet access must be taken into account in order to facilitate online learning

efficiently. Additionally, these instructional strategies have pushed educators to deal with this new normal.

Online learning enables students to study at their own speed and set convenient times for assignments and lectures, which they may find advantageous. However, in a virtual classroom, some students could find it challenging to keep themselves motivated, and they might have trouble feeling engaged in the learning community. On top of that, common issues like program compatibility problems, platform errors, and bad internet access can interfere with learning. While research has been conducted on students' perception and preference for online learning (Omar et al., 2021), the effects of student engagement, student satisfaction, and perceived learning in online learning environments (Gray & Diloreto, 2016), the impact, effectiveness, and satisfaction of online learning among undergraduate students (Wan Mamat et al., 2022) and perception towards online teaching and learning during pandemic (Mat Saad et al., 2022), little attention has been given to the French language students' perception of online learning and, more specifically, during post-COVID-19.

In most studies that examine student engagement in online learning environments, Kuh and his colleagues reported that students experienced self-reported learning gains, enhanced social skills, and increased engagement in the learning process (Hu & Kuh, 2001; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Kuh & Vesper, 2001). Chen et al. (2010) further explored the effects of student engagement based on the items on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) instrument (2008). Students' perception towards online learning has been researched in Malaysia (Mat Saad et al., 2022; Omar et al., 2021), India (Muthuprasad et al., 2021) or Saudi Arabia (Al-Kahtani, 2022). There are also studies that perceived the effectiveness of online lectures (Omani & Celcima, 2022; Romli et al., 2023; Gray & Diloreto, 2016). Similarly, the pedagogical implication of the implementation of new technologies to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes have also been studied (Sammel et al., 2014). There is one study which was carried out in Sabah in several universities focusing on the online learning perception of students from the Faculty of Business and Management and the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies (Omar et al., 2021).

Although online learning has been a subject of research in various fields, there is a lack of research on French language students' perceptions of online learning. Therefore, this research aims to address what are the perceptions of French language students towards online learning after the COVID-19 pandemic at FBMK, UPM and how does French language students perceive the online learning process.

Literature Review

Learning is the development of knowledge or skills through experience, study, or guidance (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Traditional learning typically occurs in a physical classroom setting, where academic accomplishment is commonly used as the dependent variable to assess learning (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). However, as COVID-19 spread globally, it became essential to transition from traditional education to online learning. This mode of education, commonly referred to as E-learning, has been characterized as "learning that takes place partially or entirely over the internet" (Gilbert, 2015). Based on the statistics by UNESCO (2020), as of April 2020, 186 pandemic-driven countries had implemented nationwide closure, affecting approximately 73.8% of enrolled learners. The closure of institutions has had an impact on the academic achievement of students across different educational tiers. The fourth objective of the sustainable development goals (SDG) is to guarantee comprehensive and fair access to high-quality education and foster lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals. Nevertheless, the introduction of online instruction has resulted in specific drawbacks for both educators and students. The quality of learning is directly influenced by the level of digital availability and effectiveness (Muthuprasad et al., 2021).

Online learning incorporates technology-driven components and relies on Internet infrastructure. Without access to internet services and an appropriate device for online learning, the student's progress and performance could be hindered. Furthermore, traditional classroom learning generally provides a higher level of comfort in terms of social presence, interaction, and enjoyment compared to online learning (Bali & Liu, 2018). As a matter of fact, the steep demand for an online course during the pandemic stems from the commitment to provide quality education to all students,

regardless of the situation (Chaney et al., 2010). Schlenz et al. (2020) note that students' evaluations are widely recognized as essential in assessing the benefits and value of online learning, with their attitudes being key indicators of success during evaluations. Earlier studies have proposed that online learning is both cost-effective and learner-centred, with its flexibility rendering it appropriate for a diverse global audience.

Student Engagement

A challenge in online education is that students often feel disconnected from their peers and instructors. Providing a range of relevant topics aligned with current issues in the field, and enabling students to link their practical experience, such as their professional background, with the theoretical aspects of the course, enhances engagement in discussions and assignments, as well as with their peers (Shearer, 2003). Furthermore, educators can forge connections with students by providing constructive feedback that acknowledges their achievements and outlines opportunities for improvement (Gray & Diloreto, 2016). By offering students the opportunity to make choices and exercise flexibility, they can have a more individualized and tailored learning experience (Collis & Nikolova, 1998). In addition, "teachers need the expertise to develop a class structure that stimulates social interaction and affirms rigorous academic standards while fostering independent learning skills" (Gray & Diloreto, 2016).

Parida et al. (2023) contended that "the concept of student engagement is intriguing for educators and academics, who are continuously debating its nature and complexity, as well as criticizing the depth and scope of theorizing and implementation in an empirical study." McMahon & Zyngier (2009) stated that student engagement can be categorized into three groups: instrumental, social constructivist, and critical transformative. Instrumental engagement is rooted in an objectivist viewpoint that involves assessing student participation by observation of their behaviours. It prioritizes results over the motivation and willingness behind student initiatives (Cardona et al., 2023). Social-constructivist engagement focuses on a student-centred teaching approach. The focus is on student motivation, peer-based learning, and using prior knowledge and experiences. Through a critical transformative perspective, involvement involves utilizing student knowledge, experiences, and interests to elevate overarching objectives at the community and societal levels (McMahon & Zyngier, 2009). However, student engagement is still a difficult concept to fully comprehend.

Gray and Diloreto (2016) stated that diverse strategies for enhancing student engagement in online courses encompass cultivating critical thinking skills through relevant and compelling instruction, providing constructive feedback on student work, integrating storytelling into discussions, and facilitating flexibility in course scheduling or organization.

Online Learning Environment

An online learning environment is a digital platform where educational activities and interactions occur mostly on the internet. It can be defined as the digital environment where learners interact with instructional materials, engage with instructors and peers, and take part in learning activities using digital technology (Means et al., 2013). Research indicates that well-designed online learning environments can be as effective as traditional face-to-face instruction, particularly when leveraging appropriate instructional strategies and technologies (Means et al., 2010).

Furthermore, online learning environments offer opportunities for innovative pedagogical approaches, such as flipped classrooms and personalized learning experiences (Bates & Vancouver, 2019). Yacob et al. (2020) mentioned that 54.2% of students at higher education institutions in Malaysia utilized a laptop or netbook to access their online courses and certain lecturers favour synchronous learning through the use of Zoom, Google Meet, or Webex. These methods leverage the versatility and adjustability of online platforms to meet various student requirements and encourage active interaction with course material.

Effectiveness of Online Learning

Although online learning offers advantages, it also presents drawbacks, particularly when there is a lack of accessible facilities and infrastructure to ensure the smooth facilitation of online learning. A study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of Ghanaian international students in China regarding online learning (Demuyakor, 2020). The students identified several drawbacks associated with online learning, including the financial cost of purchasing internet data access and the challenges of attending online classes due to unreliable internet connections (Demuyakor, 2020). Furthermore, the asynchronous nature of online learning can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection among learners, hindering collaborative learning experiences and the development of a supportive learning community (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997).

While there have been numerous studies on online learning, research specifically focusing on French students' perceptions on online learning within the FBMK at UPM is relatively scarce. Given the numerous challenges encountered by our department during the transition to online learning, it is advantageous to undertake this survey in order to provide valuable insights into the perceptions and preferences of French language students at FBMK, UPM towards online learning.

Methods

French language students are selected as respondents of this study. The students are from semester 1 2023/2024, semester 3 2023/2024, and semester 5 2023/2024, and the online classes are still continuing even after the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents are 30 French language students from a different year of study in FBMK. Among 30 respondents, 7 of them are male students and the rest are female students. Admittedly, in fact, the number of male students in every class is not substantial. The target population for this research includes students who have been exposed to French language learning for at least for 4 months. The sample size is determined using Slovin's Formula with a 15% margin of error, making the total 27.18, and rounded to 30.

$$\text{Slovin's Formula : } n = N / (1 + Ne^2) \quad (1)$$

n = Number of samples,
N = Total population and
e = Error tolerance (level)

Procedure

A structured preliminary questionnaire is designed with the help of a literature survey and informal discussions with lecturers and students who are currently attending the online classes. Following the completion of the pre-testing with 4 respondents, the feedback they provided was taken into consideration while constructing the final questionnaire. The questionnaires, inspired by the works of Muthuprasad et al. (2021) and Omar et al. (2021), were structured into seven distinct sections to systematically gather data from the respondents. Section one to four, are multiple-choice questions. The first section collects demographic details of the participants. The second part is the structure of online learning that the respondents preferred. The next section is about the frequency and duration of online learning. Another section is about the plan and criteria for evaluation. Likert scale was used for the fifth and seventh sections, with a score range starting from 1 until 5. The fifth section is about the respondents' perception towards online learning. An example of the question for this section is, "Online learning helps me understand more the course materials compared to face-to-face learning". The sixth section is about the benefits of online learning, an example of the question for this section is, "Online learning is more comfortable". The last section is about the bottlenecks of online learning. In terms of pedagogy, a "bottleneck" is a point in the learning process where students could encounter obstacles to comprehending what they are studying (Sturts & Mowatt, 2012). An example of the question for this section is, "Online learning can bring a lack of connectivity".

Domain of the Study

First, we pick out key informants among different years of study of French Language students for an online survey. The link for the Google Form was sent to each key informant of different years through WhatsApp. After submitting their response, they circulated the questionnaire among their batchmates, creating a snowball sampling. The link was disabled as soon as the required number of respondents was reached. In this manner, responses from a total of 30 French language students were obtained from different years of study.

Data analysis

Demographic variables were collected, followed by students' preferences, perceptions, benefits, limitations, and suggestions. To analyse and summarize the perceptions, statements are rated on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree). In summary, the data was evaluated by measuring the frequency and percentage of most of the questions. In addition, to generate the percentage table for the perceptions, a measure of consensus was used for each of the statements. The consensus was calculated using the formula suggested by Tastle and Wierman (2007).

$$cons(X) = \sum_{i=1}^{n} pi \ \log_2\{1 - (|X_i - \ \mu_X \ | \ / \ d_X)\} \quad (2)$$

P_i = probability or frequency associated with each Likert attribute X_i;
i ranges from 1 to 5
d_x = width of X
μ_x = mean of X

Additionally, each statement concerning the perspective of respondents regarding the effectiveness of online learning compared to classroom education was evaluated using Friedman's test and ranked based on the mean rank obtained. The formula utilized for computing the mean rank in Friedman's test is as follows:

$$\text{Mean rank} = \frac{12}{n_r k(k+1)} \sum R_i^2 \ - 3n_r \ (k+1) \quad (3)$$

Where K is the number of columns (treatments);
n_r = number of rows (blocks);
R_i = Sum of the ranks

The Garret ranking technique was employed to determine the primary advantages and obstacles of online learning. The respondents were provided with 5 benefits and 5 limitations and were instructed to rank them according to their personal views. The initial ranks were converted into percent positions using the following formula:

$$\text{Percent position} = 100 \ (R_{ij} - 0.5/N_j) \quad (4)$$

Where R_{ij} = Rank given for the ith Benefit/constraint by j^{th} respondents
N_j = Number of Benefits/limitations ranked by j^{th} respondents.

Afterwards, the percentage position of each rank was converted into scores using the table provided by Garrett and Woodworth (1969). The mean score of each factor was obtained by summing the scores of people for each factor and dividing it by the total number of respondents. The “benefit” and “constraint” with the highest mean scores were deemed the most significant.

Findings

In order to evaluate the perspective of French language students at FBMK, UPM towards online learning after the COVID-19 pandemic, we employed a descriptive approach (Table 1-4). A survey was done among first-year until third year students to gather and assess their perspectives on online learning. The survey covered several aspects including demographics, online class structure, frequency and duration of online classes, and plan and criteria of evaluation.

Demographic Variable

Table 1 showed that out of a total of 30 respondents, the majority are female, including first year until third year students. The majority of them also live on campus. This finding is significant as it underscores the importance of campus amenities, such as reliable internet connectivity, particularly in facilitating online learning activities. The provision of WIFI connections by the institution serves as a vital infrastructure support mechanism, ensuring that students have seamless access to digital resources and a virtual learning environment from the comfort of their campus residences. In terms of device preferences for engaging in online classes, the majority of respondents express a preference for laptops. This preference is multifaceted, as laptops offer a versatile platform that accommodates various academic activities seamlessly. Notably, respondents highlight the convenience of using laptops for note-taking, citing the ease of copying and organizing notes digitally. Additionally, the portability and flexibility of laptops enable students to review previous lecture materials and access online resources such as reading materials and supplementary websites, thereby enhancing the efficacy of their online learning experience.

Table 1. Demographic Details of the Respondents

		N=30
Demographic Variable	Item	Percentage
Gender	Male	23.30
	Female	76.70
Year of Study	1st Year (1st Sem, 23/24)	30.00
	2nd Year (3rd Sem, 23/24)	23.30
	3rd Year (5th Sem, 23/24)	46.70
Current Area of Residence	In Campus	76.70
	Out of Campus	23.30
Internet Connection Quality	Very Good	20.00
	Good	40.00
	Average	26.70
	Poor	13.30
Preferred Device for Online Class	Laptop	60.00
	Smartphone	6.70
	Tablet	13.30
	All Above	20.00

Structure of Online Learning

In Table 2, an observation indicating discernible patterns emerged regarding the preferences of respondents regarding online learning modalities. A notable trend observed is the preference for online learning formats that provide recorded class sessions. This preference is rooted in the perceived benefits of recorded sessions, which afford respondents the flexibility to revisit and review previous lessons at their convenience. This observation is consistent with the findings of prior research highlighting the value of recorded lectures in supporting student learning outcomes and enhancing retention of course materials. Additionally, respondents articulate a preference for supplementary reading materials to complement video-based course content. This inclination underscores the recognition among learners of the multifaceted nature of learning resources, with supplementary reading materials serving as a valuable adjunct to video lectures in fostering deeper understanding and

engagement with course content. Regarding the format of video content, respondents exhibit a preference for a blended approach, wherein instructors utilize both PowerPoint presentations and whiteboards or online whiteboards for knowledge dissemination. This preference aligns with contemporary pedagogical principles advocating for multimedia integration in instructional design to cater to diverse learning styles and enhance knowledge retention. By incorporating visual aids such as PowerPoint slides alongside interactive whiteboard sessions, educators can leverage the strengths of both modalities to deliver engaging and effective online instruction.

Table 2. Structure of Online Learning

		N=30
Structure of Online Learning	Item	Percentage
Online learning format	Live online learning.	20.00
	Live online learning that can be recorded.	73.30
	A pre-recorded video that is uploaded to the university website (Putrablast)/Youtube/Other application.	3.30
	Providing course materials.	3.30
Nature of course material	Reading material is sufficient.	23.30
	Video content is sufficient	6.70
	Video content comes with extra reading material	70.00
Nature of video content	As per the convenience and requirement of the course instructor	36.70
	Lecturer should teach using whiteboard/online whiteboard	0.00
	Lecturer should use PowerPoint	13.30
	Lecturer should teach using both PowerPoint and whiteboard/online white board	50.00

Frequency and Duration of Online Learning

The findings elucidated in Table 3 shed light on the nuanced preferences of respondents regarding the frequency and structure of online class sessions. Notably, the data indicate a lack of a strong consensus among respondents regarding the optimal frequency of online class sessions. This observation underscores the diverse needs and preferences of learners in navigating the online learning environment, highlighting the importance of flexibility and adaptability in course scheduling to accommodate varying individual circumstances and learning styles. However, amidst the variability in preferences for session frequency, a discernible pattern emerges with respect to the desired structure of online class sessions. Respondents articulate a clear preference for a structured format characterized by individual class sessions not exceeding a duration of two hours, coupled with a mandatory 15-minute break preceding the commencement of subsequent online classes. This preference for structured scheduling reflects a recognition among learners of the importance of time management, cognitive load considerations, and the need for periodic breaks to optimize learning retention and sustain engagement. The expressed preference for shorter, more focused class sessions aligns with cognitive load theory, which posits that learners have finite cognitive resources available for processing information and that cognitive overload can impede learning outcomes. By advocating for shorter class durations, respondents implicitly acknowledge the cognitive constraints inherent in online learning environments and emphasize the importance of instructional design principles that mitigate cognitive overload and foster optimal learning conditions.

Table 3. Frequency and Duration of Online Learning.

		N=30
Frequency and Duration of Online Learning	Item	Percentage
How often do you expect the lecturer to conduct the online	Alternate days	3.30
	As per schedule to complete the syllabus	63.30
	Daily	13.30

	Weekly once	6.70
	Weekly twice	13.30
Suitable duration for online learning (per class)	1 hour	23.70
	2 hours	70.00
	More than 2 hours	3.30
How much minute do you need to break before continuing another online class	15 min	43.30
	30 min	36.70
	Less than 15 min	0.00
	More than 30 min	20.00

Plan and Criteria of Evaluation

The preferences expressed by respondents regarding evaluation methods in online learning underscore the importance of aligning assessment strategies with the unique affordances and challenges of digital learning environments. Notably, respondents demonstrate a strong preference for quizzes or assignments as valuable assessment aids in online learning. This preference reflects a recognition among learners of the formative benefits inherent in frequent low-stakes assessments, which not only serve to gauge understanding and reinforce learning but also provide timely feedback to guide further study efforts. By favouring quizzes and assignments, respondents signal an appreciation for the iterative nature of learning in online contexts, where continuous assessment serves as a scaffold for knowledge acquisition and skill development. Furthermore, the data reveal a general inclination towards participating in online tests, underscoring the convenience and accessibility afforded by digital assessment modalities. However, it is noteworthy that a minority of respondents express a preference for in-person exams, suggesting a nuanced preference landscape influenced by factors such as individual learning styles, technological proficiency, and comfort levels with remote assessment formats. In delineating the preferred style for online exams, respondents overwhelmingly favour objective assessments. This preference likely stems from the perceived advantages of objective formats, such as multiple-choice questions, in efficiently measuring factual knowledge and facilitating automated grading processes. Moreover, the objective format aligns with the affordances of online learning environments, where scalability, consistency, and reliability in assessment administration are paramount considerations.

Table 4. Plan and Criteria for Evaluation

		N=30
Plan and criteria for evaluation	Item	Percentage
Do you feel task or quiz is necessary to achieve effective learning	Yes	90.00
	No	10.00
Do you like to attend online exams	Yes	83.30
	No	16.70
Format of online exam that you prefer	Objective	40.00
	Subjective	3.30
	Both objective and subjective	36.70
	Replaced with an assessment	20.00

Respondents' Perception towards Online Learning

The frequency and percentage were calculated for each of the 4 statements rated on a Likert-type scale, as showed in Table 5a. The finding of the study indicates a positive perception among respondents regarding their satisfaction with online classes. Specifically, respondents expressed agreement with the notion that online classes exhibit a very structured and similarity to traditional face-to-face classes. Furthermore, respondents reported a heightened sense of accessibility and communication efficacy within the online learning environment. Specifically, respondents felt that online platforms facilitated easier interaction and engagement with instructors, enabling them to

express their opinions and seek clarification on course content more readily. Moreover, the result highlights the role of social media platforms as a supplementary avenue for academic discourse and interaction. Respondents expressed a greater comfort level in utilizing social media channels to pose questions to instructors compared to traditional face-to-face interactions. However, amidst the positive perception of online learning, the study also identified a notable challenge encountered by respondents. The majority of respondents reported difficulty in understanding the lessons learned during online class sessions.

The observed variation in consensus values ranging from 0.55 to 0.65 underlines the nuanced nature of respondents ' perceptions of the effectiveness of online learning. These consensus values, which are in the very consensus range, show perfect agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of online learning methodologies. This diversity of perceptions suggests that respondents have a variety of views and experiences on the benefits and limitations of online education. Several factors can contribute to differences in perception among respondents. Among other things, differences in the availability and accessibility of the Internet can affect an individual's experience with online learning.

Table 5a: Respondents' perceptions towards online learning.

						N=30
Statements	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Consensus
1. I prefer my online learning as they are very structured and similar to face-to-face learning.	3.3	13.3	46.7	20.0	16.7	0.64
2. Online learning helps me understand more the course materials compared to face-to-face learning.	6.7	40.0	36.7	3.3	13.3	0.59
3. The online environment makes it easier for me to communicate with my instructor rather than the physical classroom environment.	6.7	23.3	20.0	23.3	26.7	0.63
4. I am more comfortable asking questions by using social media such as WhatsApp/Telegram rather than orally.	6.7	16.7	26.7	16.67	33.3	0.62

Where, 1- online learning is or might be less effective
2- online learning is or might be somewhat less effective
3- online learning is or might equally effective
4- online learning is or somewhat more effective
5- online learning is or might be much more effective

Furthermore, we utilised the Friedman test to examine the existence of patterns in the data. The respondents' positions may be random and lack a discernible pattern, therefore, comparing them just based on the average position may lead to inaccuracies. Mean rating comparison is valid only if a consistent pattern in user ratings is established. The analysis revealed a discernible pattern in the data due to the statistical significance of the test results. Mean value for each statement related to the perceived effectiveness of online learning in comparison with physical classes. The results revealed that comfortability in asking questions by using social media, much easier communication with the instructor, and preferring online learning were ranked first, second, and third, respectively (see Table 5b). The test statistic is presented in Table 5c, and its level of significance indicated that the difference was highly significant.

Table 5b. Friedman Rank Test

Ranks	
Statement	Mean Rank
S1	3.33
S2	2.77

S3	3.40
S4	3.53

Table 5c: Test Statistics for Friedman Rank Test

Test Statistics	
N	30
Chi-Square	18.31
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.00

Benefits of Online Learning

The findings underscored self-discipline and responsibility as prominent benefits attributed to online learning. This disclosure underscores the perception among respondents that online learning fosters the cultivation of self-discipline and responsibility among students. The flexible nature of online coursework often requires learners to manage their time effectively, adhere to deadlines, and take initiative in self-directed learning activities. Furthermore, respondents identified improved technical proficiency as a notable advantage of online learning. Engaging with digital learning platforms, multimedia resources, and communication tools enhances students' digital literacy skills. Additionally, the perceived comfort, and flexibility and convenience afforded by online learning environments were highlighted as key benefits. Learners appreciate the ability to access course materials and participate in learning activities from the comfort of their own homes or preferred environments (Artino & Stephens, 2009). Moreover, the data indicated that increased interaction opportunities and enhanced concentration capabilities emerged as secondary benefits of online education. Despite the physical distance between students and instructors, online platforms offer diverse avenues for interactive engagement, including discussion forums, virtual collaboration tools, and multimedia content delivery. Furthermore, respondents identified improved technical proficiency as a notable advantage of online learning. Engaging with digital learning platforms, multimedia resources, and communication tools enhances students' digital literacy skills, thereby equipping them with essential competencies for navigating the increasingly technology-driven landscape of higher education and the workforce (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Additionally, the perceived comfort and flexibility afforded by online learning environments were highlighted as key benefits. Learners appreciate the ability to access course materials and participate in learning activities from the comfort of their own homes or preferred environments. The flexibility inherent in online education, including customizable schedules and the removal of geographical constraints, enables students to balance academic pursuits with personal and professional obligations, thus promoting a more holistic approach to learning (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Table 6. Benefits of online learning

Statements	Total score	Number of Respondent	Average score	Rank
Online learning very flexible schedule and convenience.	1140	30	38.0	5
Online learning is more comfortable.	1265	30	42.17	4
Online learning can improve my technical skills.	1330	30	44.33	3
Online learning can enhance my interaction and greater ability to concentrate.	1415	30	47.17	2
Online learning can increase my self-discipline and responsibility.	1445	30	48.17	1

Bottlenecks for Online Learning

The table provided insights into the primary challenges faced by students in accessing and engaging with online learning modalities. Foremost among these challenges is the dearth of devices, which emerges as the predominant obstacle hindering students' participation in online education. The significance of this barrier is further compounded by the additional challenge posed by possessing low-quality devices, exacerbating students' ability to effectively engage with online course materials and activities. Insufficient access to appropriate devices not only impedes students' capacity to access digital learning resources but also undermines the quality and efficacy of their online learning experiences. Moreover, the absence of free internet access, particularly for students residing outside the campus area, emerges as a consequential barrier to creating conducive learning environments. Limited access to reliable internet connectivity restricts students' ability to engage with online coursework, participate in virtual discussions, and access multimedia resources essential for their academic endeavours. Furthermore, the lack of self-discipline and diminished sense of connection among students constitute additional challenges precipitated by the constraints of online learning environments. Without the structure and social interactions inherent in traditional face-to-face classroom settings, students may struggle to maintain motivation, adhere to deadlines, and collaborate effectively with peers. Lastly, the absence of face-to-face communication emerges as a salient constraint impeding students' engagement and interaction within the online learning context. The inability to engage in direct, real-time interactions with instructors and peers precludes students from accessing valuable feedback, seeking clarification on complex concepts, and fostering meaningful intellectual discourse.

Table 7: Bottlenecks in Online Learning

Statements	Total score	Number of Respondent	Average score	Rank
Online learning can bring lack of connectivity.	1215	30	40.50	3
Online learning lack face to face communication.	1130	30	37.67	4
Online learning is limited to certain self-discipline.	1215	30	40.50	3
Online learning can bring poor learning environment.	1315	30	43.83	2
Lack of device	1480	30	49.33	1

Discussion

This study examined the perspectives of individuals studying the French language concerning online learning in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study focused on their perceptions towards online learning, as well as the benefits and bottlenecks associated with participating in online learning. To our knowledge, this is the first study to demonstrate the perception of online learning among French language learners in FBMK, UPM.

Furthermore, our study empirically confirms the involvement of French language learners in an online learning environment, regardless of whether it is optimally beneficial or merely poses bottlenecks. Previous empirical research on online learning demonstrated that students with higher levels of anxiety related to online learning perceived their performance as worse and thought online resources were less helpful. Online learning anxiety decreased, and the perceived value of online content increased in the year after lockdown compared to the period during lockdown (Bono et al., 2024). However, Giday and Perumal (2024) proved that regardless whether it was pre- or post-pandemic, to achieve overall satisfaction with online learning, it must be followed by a good quality educational system and ease of use.

Based on the sample, the results indicated that French language students were positive about the structure of online and physical learning and strongly agreed that with online classes, they found it easier to communicate with instructors than face-to-face classes because they tend to feel more comfortable or more confident asking questions through social media. This is in line with previous studies in the context where online learning platforms have become integral to modern education,

especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they offer a dynamic environment for remote education (Giday & Perumal, 2024). It has also been discussed that online learning can be perceived as an evolution of distance learning where it allows students to access course materials, participate in discussion, and complete assignments from anywhere on the internet (Reyes-Millán et al., 2023). The sample showed the tendency of online classes to continue in the future based on the variety of benefits that will be obtained, highlighting that convenience and flexibility were identified as the strengths of online classes (Muthuprasad et al., 2021).

The result indicated also that some of the students find the online class beneficial, but the information delivered to them is less clear or harder to grasp compared to a traditional classroom setting, and this is not attributed to the method of delivery. We have to raise the question: are the students truly prepared to engage in online classes? Or are they only punctual and accountable for attending the online classes at the designated time, but lack the commitment to truly enhance their understanding? It has been shown, to effectively study and understand the lesson, it must be approached with seriousness and commitment. Lecturers must incorporate interactive and collaborative methods in their teaching to engage students and maintain their focus and interest during online learning sessions through frequent, meaningful activities that help to keep them focused (Muthuprasad et al., 2021).

The study's scope was delimited by several factors, primarily driven by time constraints and the necessity to focus on a specific cohort of learners within the French language program at FBMK, UPM. Consequently, the research was confined to students ranging from the first year to the third year of study within this particular academic department. This decision was made to streamline data collection efforts and facilitate a more targeted analysis of learner perceptions within a manageable timeframe. Furthermore, the study opted to exclude certain groups from its analysis to maintain clarity and expedite the research process. Notably, final-year students enrolled in the Bachelor of French language program were omitted from the study population. While their perspectives could have offered valuable insights, their exclusion was deemed necessary to maintain consistency and focus on the experiences of students at earlier stages of their academic journey. Additionally, students enrolled in French Language programs at other universities, despite sharing similar course content, were not included in the study. By narrowing the focus exclusively to learners within FBMK, UPM, the research aimed to capture insights specific to this institutional context, thereby enhancing the relevance and applicability of the findings to the target population.

Our perception study includes a constraint in that the replies are contingent upon the manner in which the questions are presented. Insights can only be derived from statements that have recorded answers. In order to expand students' understanding of the online course and the aspects that contribute to its success, further study can employ content analysis. Further research should also be conducted on French language students and/or teachers in another type of institutions to shed further light on the present study's conclusion. Had the study conducted semi-structured interviews with the lecturers or students from the language department, delivering questionnaires to the students that take this course at other universities would have been more informative and robust. Future research might have the resources and means to construct a study in such a manner.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to describe and examine the perception of French language students and we have done so by delivering a questionnaire to 30 French language students at FBMK, UPM.

In conclusion, the perception of French language students towards online classes during the post-pandemic period was positive. The factors that contributed to the positive results are: 1) they are very structured and similar to face-to-face learning 2) the online environment makes it easier to communicate with instructor rather than physical environment 3) more comfortable to ask question by using social media.

Co-Author Contribution

The authors confirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author 1 completed the fieldwork, wrote the introduction, the research methodology the conclusion and recommendations for future research, analysed, interpreted the results statistically, and prepared the literature review. Author 2 discussed the findings, organized the framework and reviewed the paper.

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