Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching
Department of English Studies, Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts, Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz
SSLLT 14 (1). 2024. 149-170
https://doi.org/10.14746/sslltt.42375
http://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/sslltt

"Profesora is doing a great job!" or "Online learning sucks": The relationship between students' profiles and online language learning

Ching-Hsuan Wu ✉
Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, USA
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1604-1013
ching-hsuan.wu@case.edu

Sergio Robles-Puente
West Virginia University, Morgantown, USA
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4348-2022
seroblespuente@mail.wvu.edu

Amy S. Thompson
West Virginia University, Morgantown, USA
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4505-1755
amy.thompson@mail.wvu.edu

Abstract

The impetus of this study is to investigate students' attitudes towards online language learning based on their previous academic experiences and year of study, including the decision to major or minor (i.e., motivation). A total of 975 students completed a survey questionnaire consisting of background information, Likert scale items, and open-ended questions. The quantitative data were analyzed using an exploratory factor analysis and one-way ANOVAs and were complemented with qualitative data based on students' responses. Findings indicate that students generally want consistent access to online learning, and that students with prior online-learning experience or with a desire to take an online course presented a statistically significant more positive perception of online language classes. There were also differences in perception

of success in the online classes between those students who intended to major or minor in the language and those who did not. The results further revealed a decline in perception of success in online classes with the higher-level classifications (i.e., year of study). This study provides baseline attitudinal data to be built upon in future research and informs stakeholders of language programs in their curricular decisions.

Keywords: online learning; attitudes; grit; technological readiness; anxiety; motivation

1. Introduction

In March 2020 when emergency remote teaching (ERT, Hodges et al., 2020) was implemented as a safety measure, online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic became the default for many world language programs at higher education institutions in the United States. ERT refers to an urgent shift of instructional delivery to a fully online mode by temporarily replacing face-to-face teaching components with online instruction in response to the global pandemic. As such, ERT during the Spring 2020 semester (January to May) is meaningfully different from planned online teaching that is typically mediated through systematic integration of pedagogical technologies. Having experienced ERT, faculty and students of language programs may have become more accustomed to virtual alternatives by the Fall 2020 semester (August to December).

However, such pandemic-enforced experience in Fall 2020 was still distinct from a well-organized online education that faculty and students would have been able to voluntarily adopt based on their interests and needs. For example, students who were enrolled in face-to-face classes in Fall 2020 but were placed in quarantine needed to switch to a virtual platform immediately and proceed in their learning synchronously with the rest of the class who remained in the classroom. Another instance concerns temporary cancellations of in-person courses amid increasing COVID-19 cases during Fall 2020. These cancellations may have been followed first by swift moves to online learning and then shifts back to in-person learning in a span of several weeks. Moreover, technological readiness and grit of faculty and students in structuring almost the entirety of their teaching and learning digitally in an effective, sustainable way presented additional sets of challenges in Fall 2020. This pandemic-prompted model of learning has "its own culture, ideologies and mechanisms" (Oraif & Elyas, 2021) that were unfamiliar to educators, students, and students' families. These unprecedented online migration activities and learning disruptions necessitated by the pandemic have illuminated struggles for world language programs

and intensified the language learning "crisis" (Lanvers et al., 2021) for languages other than English (LOTEs). These challenges included but were not limited to reconditioning the educational environment, responding to needs for teacher education, and fostering the quality teaching and learning with the repercussions of the pandemic in mind (Salih & Omar, 2021). Although delivering virtual language education has been in practice for three decades and studies in technology-mediated language education are one of the most dynamic areas of education research (Thomas et al., 2013), this necessarily rapid transition to online language learning left a new landscape for language educators and a gap in student expectations (Moser et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, the majority of language students and faculty alike exhibited resilience (Capstick, 2018) and the desire to succeed. Resilience in this study refers to the ability of individuals to withstand shocks and stresses in language learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (extreme adversity in some instances), recover from such stresses, and work with the institutions to achieve transformational change for sustainability. Such academic perseverance embraces other theoretical constructs such as anxiety, self-confidence, buoyancy, intended effort, motivational selves, and technological readiness.

There are also related practical constructs, such as study habits, organization, perceived success in online learning, assessment norms, willingness to seek help outside of class, among others. These constructs were carefully selected for investigation to encapsulate the diverse aspects of students' backgrounds that have a relationship to attitudes towards sudden changes in course modality. An investigation of these characteristics in student resilience in the midst of global disaster significantly extends the existing understanding of resilience in relation to world language learning. As such, the current study is an examination of students' attitudes toward online learning by taking into account their year of study, experiences, desire for online learning experiences, and motivations.

2. Literature review: Online instruction effectiveness and evaluation before and during the pandemic

Before the pandemic started in 2020, computer-based language instruction had already long co-existed with face-to-face instruction since the 1960s, and synchronous teaching became available in the 1990s (Eastment 1996; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). While ERT instigated by the pandemic is meaningfully different from planned online teaching, the development of remote language teaching evolves on a continuum, and the related studies focused on the effectiveness,

challenges, and acceptance of technology-mediated instruction provides an overview of the role of online instruction in language education.

Studies show that technology-assisted learning can be effective, and learners who receive computer-mediated instruction perform equally well with or outperform learners who learn a second or foreign language in a face-to-face modality on standardized tests or class assessments (Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; Chenoweth et al., 2006, 2008; Stenson et al, 1992; Tateyama, 2015; Young, 2008). In addition to test results, the helpfulness of technology in language learning is also perceived by instructors and learners (e.g., Grgurović, 2011). According to Alipour (2020), technology is part of people's day-to-day lives, and this can partially explain why technology-delivered language instruction is favorably received in studies. The positive impact of technology on language learning continued to be found during the pandemic in students' writing skills (e.g., Salih & Omar, 2021), perceptions of instructors and/or students (e.g., Salih & Omar, 2021; Wu, 2022), student engagement (e.g., Oraif & Elyas, 2021), and self-paced learning (e.g., Kamal et al., 2021; Maican & Cocorada, 2021).

Nonetheless, studies show a lack of face-to-face interactions in language learning can result in negative effects and concerns, as shown in the following studies. Limited language proficiency can restrict students' interaction when using online chat functions or placed in breakout rooms (e.g., Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; Wu, 2022). Technical difficulties pose challenges in learning and teaching (e.g., Salih & Omar, 2021; Tateyama, 2015; Young, 2008). Oral skills are perceived less developed in an online environment (e.g., Maican & Cocorada, 2021; Salih & Omar, 2021). Instructors' workload and demands on students' efforts increase in a virtual setting (e.g., Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; Maican & Cocorada, 2021; Wu & Huang, 2022).

In light of the reported positive feedback and concerning discoveries about technology-mediated language instruction, researchers and practitioners suggest that hybrid instruction be considered for post-pandemic language teaching paradigm (e.g., Bozavli, 2021; Hamad et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2021). While hybrid instruction is a potential solution, language learning experiences and outcomes can be dependent on learners' individual differences. For example, anxiety has been a long-time affective variable in language course success, launched by the seminal article by Horwitz, Horwitz et al. (1986) and the development of the 33-item *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS). Overall, a negative correlation between anxiety and performance has been found and the FLCAS and a number of recent studies have found differing underlying constructs to measure both anxiety and self-confidence (e.g., MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Thompson & Lee, 2014). Language learning motivation is another oft-studied concept in SLA research with the most recent framework being the L2 motivational self system

(L2MSS, Dörnyei, 2009; Thompson, 2017). A two part-system comprised of selves (ideal, ought-to, and more recently anti-ought-to) and the learning experience, the selves are manifestations of who a learner envisions to become (ideal self), who the learner believes others think they should be (ought-to self), and who the learner would like to become, despite opposition from external factors (anti-ought-to self) in a symbiotic relationship of the language learning context (i.e., the language learning experience; Thompson, 2021). Similarly, intended learning effort, or the amount of time and effort learners spend on learning, has also been used in conjunction with the L2MSS as a criterion measure with a widely used scale developed by Taguchi et al. (2009). The related concept of motivated learning behavior has been used to operationalize the language learning experience in the L2MSS (Papi et al., 2019), although learning experience has also been operationalized as context, broadly construed (Thompson, 2021). Buoyancy, which is adaptiveness to challenges, has been shown as a significant predictor of language learning achievement, as well as overall academic achievement (Yun et al., 2018). Grit, or perseverance for long-term goals (Teimouri et al., 2020), although conceptually distinct from buoyancy, has also been linked to achievement (Sudina & Plonsky, 2021). Success in online courses also depends on students' technology readiness, which is experience with and openness to different technologies (Hong & Kim, 2018). Study habits, perception of success at learning, organization, types of assessment, and willingness to accept help outside of class are also all related to successes in and perceptions of online courses.

Considering the positive effects and concerns of online language instruction and recognizing the role that the aforementioned learners' characteristics play in their learning experience and outcomes, the study intends to explain learners' post-ERT virtual learning experience by investigating variables pertaining to students' backgrounds, such as their prior experience with online classes, their desire for an online mode, their year of study, their language majors or minors status, and a variety of other affective variables. This study fills the gap in the research by examining such variables in a post-ERT context that have not yet been widely explored in the previous studies.

Contextualized in the annual assessment activities of the Department of World Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics (WLLL) at West Virginia University (WVU), the impetus of this project was to explore students' attitudes and perception of effectiveness of online teaching during COVID-19. Specifically, the research questions (RQs) were as follows:

RQ1: Did students judge online instruction to be more effective based on:

a) previous experience with online learning?
b) desire to take online classes?

RQ2: Did students judge their success in online classes based on:
a) intent to major or minor (i.e., motivation)?
b) year of study (i.e., previous university experience)?

3. Methods

3.1. Context and participants

Data were collected from students at WVU, which is a public land-grant research university in Morgantown, WV. In studying rurality in relation to sociolinguistic variables, Hazen (2018) states: "The State of WV does not have truly urban areas" (p. 80). Census Bureau data for 2018 reports 21.9% (67.3 million) residents in the United States speak a language other than English at home. In contrast, only 2.6% of people in WV speak a language other than English, and this percentage is ranked 50th by state in 2019 (Statista Research Group, 2022). In the US context, The Modern Language Association (Looney & Lusin, 2019) reports that 7.5% of students who registered in postsecondary institutions in the United States during 2016 took language courses; however, WV ranked 41st by state in the number of postsecondary students who were involved in language learning.

At the time of the data collection, the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, where WLLL is housed, required students who are earning a Bachelor of Arts to complete at minimum the fourth semester of a LOTE; this requirement has since been eliminated. Also, at the time of the data collection, approximately 3,000 students were enrolled in at least one class with WLLL each semester, and the eight languages taught were Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish; additionally, linguistics, applied linguistics, and literature/culture classes in English were also taught. Unfortunately, starting in Fall 2023, all language and linguistics/applied linguistics programs at WVU were eliminated (Hanlon, 2023), meaning almost no language, culture, or linguistics/applied linguistics courses will be offered at the university in the future.

Prior to Fall 2023, in an effort to continuously reflect on and improve teaching and learning in the department, WLLL conducts an annual assessment on a selected theme pertaining to language education, such as student skills in presentational communication and students' perceptions of social justice as a curricular component in world languages. The department encourages both faculty and students to participate in the yearly assessment efforts by filling out questionnaires designed by the departmental assessment committee with support from the Department Chair. The committee then synthesizes the data, shares the results with the faculty and students, and submits the report to the Dean's Office of the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences.

During Fall (August to December) 2020, WVU implemented the strategy of a phased return to campus in an attempt to reduce the overall density of in-person educational opportunities and to offer an on-campus experience for first-year students, graduate students, and professional students in terms consistent with COVID-19 safety protocols. Hence, courses were offered in three formats: online, hybrid, and in-person as the semester began in August 2020. There were approximately 70% more online classes in Fall 2020 compared with the pre-pandemic numbers. This drastic, though expected, change in instructional delivery motivated the assessment committee to gather information on online teaching and learning, investigate how the pandemic language learning experiences were perceived by students and how these experiences informed the future of language education, and make an action plan for pandemic and post-pandemic online pedagogy.

On September 7, 2020, due to the spikes of COVID-19 cases on campus, the University announced that all undergraduate courses at WVU, with the exception of courses that engaged students in clinical rotation, needed to move to online instruction for two weeks. With this emergency two-week transition and sporadic situations where individual students needed to join their in-person class through videoconferencing due to quarantine requirements, all undergraduate students in WLLL had participated in online learning experiences by the time the study was conducted in late October 2020. Hence, all the undergraduate students who were enrolled with the department during Fall 2020 were given the opportunity to complete the assessment survey. Every instructor in the department was also informed of the purpose and procedure of this assessment activity and was invited to encourage their students to partake in the survey.

Table 1 Survey responses by subject code

Subject codes	Number of responses	Percentages
Arabic language	17	1.74%
Chinese language	36	3.69%
Classics	4	0.41%
Foreign Culture in Translation	36	3.69%
Foreign Literature in Translation	11	1.13%
French language	108	11.08%
German language	65	6.67%
Italian language	50	5.13%
Japanese language	17	1.74%
Language Teaching Methods	4	0.41%
Linguistics	12	1.23%
Russian language	19	1.95%
Slavic and Eastern European Studies	2	0.21%
Spanish language	537	55.08%
Unspecified	57	5.85%
Total	975	100.00%

As the goal of the current study is to determine the success of online classes in Fall 2020 in order to prepare for future semesters, it is important to uncover the survey participants' academic status. Including both complete and incomplete responses, 975 were received with 12% being freshmen, 32% sophomores, 28% juniors, 22% seniors, and 6% unidentified. As Table 1 shows, all fourteen subject codes in the department were represented in the pool of returned questionnaires; 5% of the survey participants did not specify the courses they were taking with the department during the time of the study. The numbers of responses in the fourteen strands of subject in general proportionally reflected their enrollment sizes during the time of the study.

3.2. Materials and data collection

An online survey was created by the WLLL assessment committee via Qualtrics and was distributed to all students enrolled in language, culture, and linguistics classes on October 28th, 2020 – 3,226 students – and remained open for approximately one month. As all students have experience with technology via the course management systems, it can be assumed that the students had equal amounts of facility with the data collection method. For the analyses, data from 975 students who responded to at least part of the questionnaire were used (number in each analysis indicated below).

The questionnaire design consisted of three main parts: background information (used for context and independent variables – 17 items), Likert-scale items (32 items), and open-ended questions (5 items). The background items consisted of questions, such as the online course taken, year of study in college, major, plans to major or minor in the language taken, language and travel experience, time per day spent using technology, experience with and choice of online classes, and class type preference. Some of these background questions were used as independent (grouping) variables in the analyses below, and others were used to provide information on the context. The Likert-scale items (1 = "strongly disagree," 2 = "disagree," 3 = "slightly disagree," 4 = "slightly agree," 5 = "agree," and 6 = "strongly agree") are provided below in the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The items were primarily taken from previously validated questionnaires and were slightly modified for this context.

Themes included in the questionnaire were as follows with references in the literature review: anxiety (2), assessment (3), buoyancy (2), help outside of class (3), intended learning effort (2), motivation (ideal [1], ought-to [2], and anti-ought-to [1] selves), organization (3), participation (2), self-confidence (2), study habits (2), successful learning in an online class (3), and technology aptitude

(4). These themes were included specifically because we believe all of them play a role in student perceptions and success in online language classes (Field, 2013, p. 667). These Likert-scale items were analyzed (see below) with the emerging factors used as dependent variables for the analyses; in other words, as Field (2013) describes, "the purpose of the factor analysis is to reduce a large set of data to a smaller subset of measurement variables" for the further analyses to be "carried out on the factor scores rather than the original data" (p. 673). For the data collection, the items were randomized (i.e., not organized by topic), and the labels of the latent variables in Table 3 below were only created after the data had been collected. The open-ended questions included topics such as favorite aspects of class and areas of improvement, input about assignments, course organization, and an opportunity to comment about any other aspect of the online class.

3.3. Data analysis

The analyses used for this project were an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and one-way ANOVAs. On a practical level, it is hypothesized that the Likert scale items all relate to student success in and perceptions of online language classes. The EFA grouped the similar items from different constructs to form thematic factors to be used for analysis. The ANOVAs were used to analyze potential differences between groups of students, using the student profile information as information to form the various groups.

An EFA with data from the 794 participants who completed the 32 Likert-scale items was run, resulting in seven factors. The difference in the total number of participants and the number in the EFA was due to listwise case elimination for incomplete responses on the Likert-scale items. When the first EFA was run, two items did not load onto the solution at a level of .3 or higher: (1) "There are about the same number of homework assignments for my online class as there are in my face-to-face classes" and (6) "I need some additional instructor support to understand how to best engage with my online class." As such, the two items were removed and the EFA was run again, resulting in the final solution in Table 3. The EFA employed the Maximum Likelihood extraction method and the oblique direct oblimin rotation method. The items were included if they loaded at .3 or greater onto a factor, and factors were considered if they had an eigenvalue greater than 1. The KMO value for this analysis was .898, illustrating an adequate sample size. The items that had a negative loading for the final solution (4, 8, 13, 14, 15, 25, and 29) were reverse coded before any subsequent analyses were performed. Cronbach's alpha (CA) internal reliability tests were run on each factor; the resulting item loadings, factor names, and CA results are presented in Table 3.

One-way ANOVAs (i.e., group difference analyses) were conducted for group comparisons for RQs 1 and 2. For RQ1, "Did students judge online instruction to be more effective based on: a) previous experience with online learning? and b) desire to take online classes?" a one-way ANOVA was performed, using F4, "Online is fine" as the dependent variable for both parts of the RQ. For RQ1a, prior experience with online learning was the independent (i.e., grouping) variable and for RQ1b, desire to take online classes was the independent variable. For RQ2, "Did students judge their success in online classes based on: a) intent to major or minor (i.e. motivation)? and b) year of study (i.e. previous university experience)?" F1, "Success in online classes" was the dependent variable and intent to major or minor in the language (i.e., motivation) was the independent variable for part a. Year of study (i.e., previous university experience) was used as the independent variable for part b. The analyses varied in terms of participants per group, which is not uncommon for survey-based research. Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was examined for each ANOVA; no Levene statistic was significant, indicating a robust analysis. Additionally, effect sizes were calculated for each ANOVA and are presented in the results. In terms of the qualitative data produced by the open-ended questions, a full analysis is outside the scope of the current publication; however, illustrative quotations to help explain the quantitative results are presented in the results and discussion sections.

4. Results

Table 2 illustrates the details of the EFA. All factors in the seven-factor solution resulted in a CA that was adequate to be used in the subsequent analyses. The sample items in each factor provide information on what that specific factor measures. In sum, the items that patterned together to create the seven factors all relate to student success in and perceptions of online language classes.

Table 2 *EFA for the Likert-scale items*

	Factor							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	h^2
F1: Success in online classes, CA = .781								
14. I find it difficult to keep track of assignments for my online class. (organization)	-.790							.748
7. I am able to keep track of my assignments in my online class. (organization)	.612							.649
32. I am doing well in my online class this semester. (successful learning in an online class)	.309						-.306	.571
F2: Enthusiasm about content, CA = .808								
28. I would take this class even if it weren't required. (ought-to self)		.896						.846
4. I am only taking this class because of the university requirement. (ought-to self)		-.846						.715
16. I am studying this topic partially because it is a challenge. (anti-ought-to self)		.494						.395
27. I really want to learn the information in my class. (intended learning effort)		.461						.386
18. I imagine myself as someone who is able to master the content of this course. (ideal self)		.379					-.307	.504
F3: Grit, CA = .725								
19. I can honestly say that I'm doing my best to succeed in my online class this semester. (intended learning effort)			.599					.361
2. My study habits are appropriate for my online class this semester. (study habits)			.587					.534

3. When I run into a difficult problem in my online class, I keep working on it until I think I've solved it. (buoyancy)			.542			.420
30. If there is a technology-related issue in my class, I keep working to solve it, even when others have given up. (buoyancy)			.481	.320		.428
17. I ask for help when I need it for my online class (i.e. office hours, language support center, contacting instructor, etc.). (help outside class)			.453			.338
20. I typically attend office hours when they are in person when I need help with an aspect of my course. (help outside class)			.345			.156
F4: Online is fine! CA = .792						
25. It is easier to learn language in face-to-face classes than in online classes. (successful learning in an online class)			-.836			.697
9. Learning a language online can be as effective as learning a language in a face-to-face classroom setting. (successful learning in an online class)			.731			.632
13. I feel that it's more difficult to participate in online classes than in face-to-face classes. (participation)			-.653			.565
21. I participate as much in my online class as I would in my face-to-face classes. (participation)			.322	.507		.457
F5: Technological aptitude, CA = .695						
8. Spending time learning about new technology is frustrating for me. (technology aptitude)				-.856		.788
24. Learning about new technology is exciting for me. (technology aptitude)				.577		.495
31. I am comfortable using the technology needed for my course. (successful learning in an online class)				.372	.342	.529
F6: Instructor effectiveness, CA = .803						
5. My course instructor understands the technology needed to teach my online class. (technology aptitude)					.738	.509
23. My instructor is available to help me when needed. (help outside class)					.731	.554
12. I am able to easily find the course materials posted on my eCampus page. (organization)	.432				.527	.616
22. There is an appropriate amount of work required for this online class. (assessment)					.412	.491
11. The grades I am getting on assignments this semester in my online class reflect my knowledge of the content. (assessment)					.374	.448
F7: Online course anxiety, CA = .730						
29. I feel confident when I participate in my online class. (self-confidence)					-.649	.661
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my online language class than in my other online classes. (anxiety)					.597	.562
10. I always feel that the other students speak this language better than I do. (anxiety)					.593	.409
15. When I'm about to start my online class, I feel sure and relaxed. (self-confidence)					-.483	.550

Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores for each factor for all of the participants, which was used to answer the RQs. As can be seen, the factor averages for the total participants (i.e., before any group differences were examined) were all greater than 3.5, other than F4, "Online is fine" meaning that overall, students in these classes felt successful in online classes (F1), were enthusiastic about the content (F2), exhibited grit (F3), had a good amount of technological aptitude (F5), thought the instructors were effective (F6), and had online course anxiety (F7); however, on average, they did not feel that online was fine (F4).

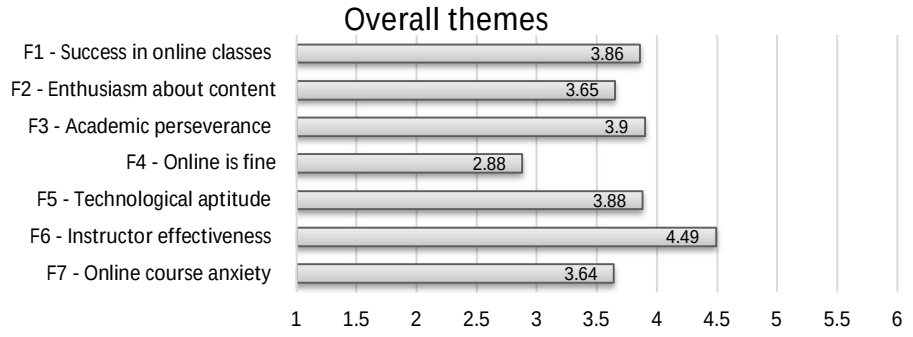

Figure 1 Likert-scale averages for the EFA latent variables

RQ1a was intended to determine if there is a difference in the perception of online classes based on students' previous experience with online learning.

Figure 2 illustrates the average results for all sample items under F4 (Online is fine, see Table 2) for both types of students.

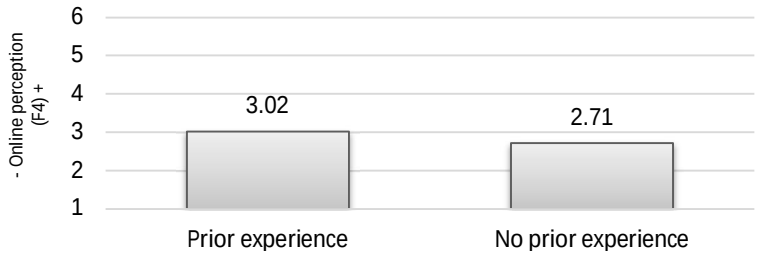

Figure 2 Likert-scale averages for prior experience with online classes and F4 (Online is fine)

While both groups seemed to slightly disfavor online learning, results indicate that students with prior experience had a more positive perception (3.02, N = 476) than those without it (2.71, N = 368). As reflected in Table 3, this difference between groups was statistically significant (p < .001), although the effect size was small.

Table 3 ANOVA for prior experience with online classes and F4 (Online is fine)

	df	*F*	η^2	*p*
F4	1,842	12.897	0.015	.000

Interestingly, qualitative data reflected variability in the answers regardless of the group. For example, one student with prior experience commented "If you've done online classes before, you likely are used to it, but it is a learning curve." Another commented, "Learning online is not much different from learning in person!" Students with no prior experience had comments such as "Online learning a language absolutely sucks" or "I had never taken an online class before, but I really do enjoy the flexibility and freedom that comes with them."

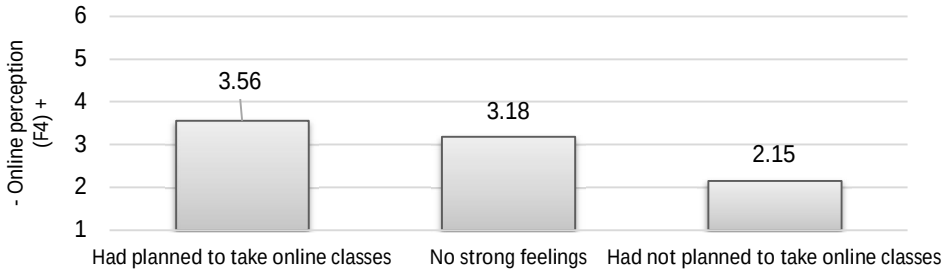

Figure 3 Likert-scale averages for desire for online classes and F4 (Online is fine)

RQ1b focuses on students' perception of online learning based on whether they were originally planning to take online classes or not (or if they did not care). Figure 3 illustrates the average results grouping all items under online learning perception (F4, see Table 3) and these show that there is a noticeable difference between groups.

Students who wanted to take their language class online perceived this modality to be acceptable (3.56, *N* = 268). Those who felt neutral about the course modality also had a relatively neutral average (3.18, *N* = 234); however, those who did not want to take their language class online, but who were required to because of pandemic scheduling did not perceive their online classes to foster learning to the same level that the face-to-face classes do (2.15, *N* = 342). These differences between groups were exemplified in many answers to the open-ended questions as well: "Personally I think it is easier to learn a language in an online setting compared to face to face" (planned) vs. "I've enjoyed the online experience and my teacher is always super helpful" (had not planned) vs. "I really don't like online classes at all. They're very confusing" (had not planned). Differences were corroborated statistically with an ANOVA with a large effect size (see Table 4), and Tukey post-hoc tests revealed that all groups were significantly different from each other ($p < .001$).

Table 4 ANOVA for desire for online classes and F4 (Online is fine)

	df	*F*	η^2	*p*
F4	2,841	142.072	0.253	.000

RQ2a examined how well students thought they were doing in their online class based on whether they were planning on obtaining a major or a minor in a language or not (or if they are still thinking about it). Results illustrated in Figure 4 show the average ratings for all questionnaire items under the first factor (F1: Success in online classes, see Table 2).

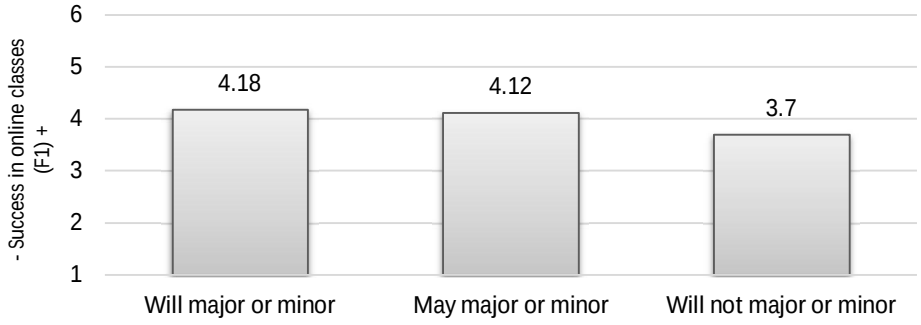

Figure 4 Likert-scale averages for intent to major or minor with F1 (Success in online classes)

Results indicate that students who intended to major or minor (or those who were already doing so) had the highest mean when rating their success online (4.18, *N* = 148). Interestingly, those who were not sure yet still showed similar results (4.12, *N* = 142). Finally, those students that were not planning on pursuing a major or a minor, rated their success in online classes lower (3.7, *N* = 557). Open-ended questions captured both positive and negative comments in all three groups, but the latter were more common in the group with those who did not intend to major or minor (e.g., Will major or minor: "You can learn as effectively as you would in person." and "I feel like I am learning less than I should online." vs. Will not major or minor: "Online is no place to learn a language" and "The class overall has been okay, but I have found it more difficult to succeed and learn than in a face to face course."). Mean differences between groups were statistically significant as captured by the ANOVA in Table 5 with a small to medium effect size. In the Tukey post-hoc analysis, significant differences were found between those who were intending to major or minor and those who were not ($p < .001$). There was not a significant difference between those who were intending to major or minor and those who were still deciding ($p = .931$). However, there was a significant difference between those who were not intending to major or minor and those who were still deciding ($p = .001$).

Table 5 ANOVA for intent to major or minor with F1 (Success in online classes)

	df	*F*	η^2	*p*
F1	2,844	12.509	0.030	.000

RQ2b aimed to analyze if students with different years of study (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior) perceived their success in online classes differently. Figure 5 illustrates the results for the four groups based on the first factor (F1: Success in their online classes, see Table 2).

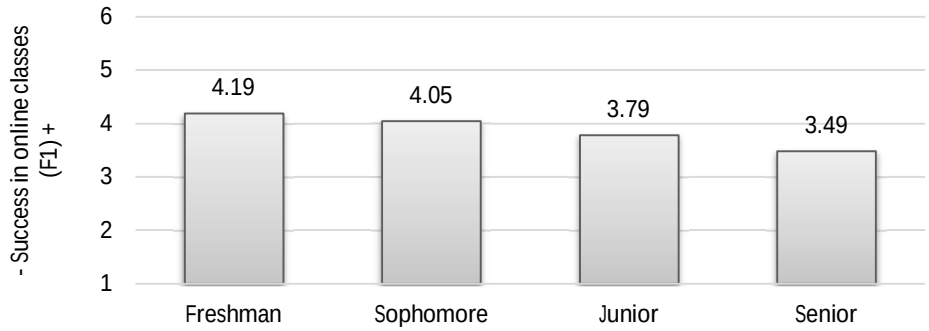

Figure 5 Likert-scale averages for year of study with F1 (Success in online classes)

Freshmen perceived their online classes as more successful than the other groups, with a mean of 4.19 (N = 102). This mean consistently decreased as the year of study increased (Sophomore: 4.05, N = *294* vs. Junior: 3.79, N = 252 vs. Senior: 3.49, N = 199). After a significant difference had been found in the ANOVA with a small to medium effect size (see Table 6), Tukey post-hoc analyses revealed significant differences between freshmen and juniors (p = .033), freshmen and seniors (p < .001), and sophomores and seniors (p < .001). Differences between sophomores and juniors (p = .079) and juniors and seniors (p = .054) were approaching significance. There was no significant difference between freshmen and sophomores (p = .754).

Table 6 ANOVA for year of study with F1 (Success in online classes)

	df	*F*	η^2	*p*
F1	3,843	10.670	0.037	.000

While students' comments did not always refer to their success, they confirmed that there was variation in their perception of the classes: "I had never taken an online class before, but I really do enjoy the flexibility and freedom that comes with them" (freshman), "It makes me feel like I'm in an actual class" (sophomore), "The online class is a challenge for all of us" (sophomore), "I surprisingly loved the online version much more" (junior), "It's different but something I have adapted to!" (senior), "I learn a lot more in person" (senior).

6. Discussion

The goal of this project was to explore students' attitudes towards online teaching and their success in online classes by considering their previous learning experiences and academic profiles. According to the quantitative results, those that had previous experience with online learning had a more positive perception of it (RQ1a). Likewise, students that were planning on taking courses online before the pandemic rated their online experience more positively than those that were unexpectedly required to move to this mode of instruction due to safety measurements (RQ1b). These data, together with some of the students' open-ended comments, suggest that students should only take classes in this modality if they believe they are suitable for them (i.e., not imposed or required) and that they may have to undergo an adaptation process to the online environment (Hong & Kim, 2018; Yun et al., 2018). Results also indicate that students' perception of online class effectiveness depended on their intent to major or minor in a language, as well as on their year of study. Students that intended to major or

minor (or were considering it) had greater perceptions of success in their online classes than those who were majoring or minoring (RQ2a). This contrast can be attributed to the extra motivation majors and minors have as opposed to those that are taking language classes due to other requirements (Dörnyei, 2009; Papi et al., 2019; Thompson, 2017). Finally, first-year university students (freshman) perceived greater success in their online classes than any of the other groups, with seniors being the least satisfied overall (RQ2b). Many university administrators expected freshmen to struggle the most with online classes. Interestingly, these results showed an opposite trend of what had been anticipated, with decreasing perceived success in online classes as the classification increased. This difference may come from students' previous experiences and expectations in the academic setting. On the one hand, those students that were used to having classes and interactions in person in the university context (e.g., juniors or seniors) might have found learning in the online environment more challenging since it was a new situation that required different learning habits. In contrast, students that had spent less time in university face-to-face academic settings might have been more successful at developing new learning routines (Thompson, 2021; Yun et al., 2018). Overall, data that help us answer the research questions suggest that students' profiles and prior university experiences should be considered by administrators, advisors and language teachers when offering online classes. Nevertheless, qualitative results indicate that other relevant factors might play a role in how students perceive online instruction and can explain the varied types of opinions. For this reason, we discuss them briefly in the following lines.

While some students expressed their discontent with different aspects of online learning, the great majority of their feedback was positive. Students' varied responses to the open-ended questions captured what was previously discussed in the literature including the preference for and effectiveness of face-to-face classes and online classes (Alipour, 2020; Jin et al. 2021; Maican & Cocorada, 2021; Oraif & Elyas, 2021; Salih & Omar, 2021; Stenson et al., 1992; Tateyama, 2015), the preference for and effectiveness of synchronous and asynchronous classes (Tateyama, 2015) and the potential problems with technology, connectivity and automated grading systems (Chenoweth & Murday, 2003; Ko & Rossen, 2017; Tateyama, 2015; Young, 2008). According to the responses, one of the most attractive points in relation to Online is fine (F4) was convenience, not having to be physically present in a classroom and, in the case of asynchronous classes, non-rigid schedules. Additionally, some students that were taking synchronous classes reported that they wished they had that flexibility, but some others were happy with their 'live' classes or wanted their classes to move to that modality or in person. While many students described teaching platforms and materials as "helpful," "fun," "beneficial," or "informative," others reported problems with technology or the automated grading system. Ko and Rossen (2017) compile a list

of technical issues virtual classrooms in multiple disciplines may present and, based on our data, language classes are no exception. Some students were also concerned about the amount of work, the calendar, and deadlines. Others suggested that uploading videos of the classes/lectures would be helpful and further shared a need to assess their familiarity with the structure/platforms used for online classes at the beginning of the semester to understand what additional instruction and support could be provided for maximum success in the class. These comments are in line with Chenoweth et al. (2006, 2008), who suggest that teachers and students should become familiar with the electronic learning environment and have constant technical support in order to solve unforeseen technical difficulties and have a successful virtual experience. Pozo et al. (2021) reported that activities in remote teaching during school lockdowns tended to be more teacher-centered than student-centered and concluded that digital technologies should be used to promote a more constructive learning. Fortunately, in addressing areas related to Instructor effectiveness (F6), comments in our survey were overwhelmingly positive. In many cases, students highlighted the effort instructors put in their teaching (e.g., "It is a really fun class, and my professor has made it feel like we're in a live classroom, even though it's online!") and the only negative point a few students reported was concerning their instructors' communication. Organization, updating grades, prompt responses are all critical in teaching regardless of the modality, and students pointed out that these aspects were especially salient for online classes. Finally, most students preferred a face-to-face version of the class (only about 25% indicated that they would always prefer online classes), either because they thought it was easier, more useful and engaging, or because they wanted to interact with people in person. Nevertheless, some students commented on how online instruction had improved their learning experience by lowering their anxiety and finding it more engaging, and that it should be offered on a regular basis (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Thompson & Lee, 2014).

These additional qualitative data offer language educators valuable information to understand the trends captured by the quantitative information and highlight the complexity of preference diversity that institutions and instructors have to face when designing their language classes not only during the pandemic but in the future. Going from responses like "I hate online learning" or "online sucks" to "I'm very impressed by how well this class has been adapted to the online setting" or "Profesora is doing a great job!" may depend on multiple factors that make each student and learning experience different. In order to accommodate all preferences, language programs could ideally consider offering classes in multiple teaching modes (e.g., face-to-face synchronous vs. online synchronous vs. online asynchronous) or, alternatively, blended learning classes (Alipour, 2020; Chenoweth et al., 2006, 2008; Grgurović, 2011; Young, 2008; Zhang & Zhu, 2020).

7. Conclusion

This study adds empirical knowledge of transitional online language learning amid COVID-19 to the literature of planned online language learning, ERT, and post-pandemic world language education. Current findings are informative for stakeholders of language programs, including learners, educators, program administrators, and researchers. Our data suggest that students' profiles, goals, and previous academic experiences should be considered prior to enrolling in language classes online. Likewise, a planned training when feasible can help students that are new to the virtual language learning experience with their adaptation and calibrating their expectations. Finally, based on the variability in students' preferences for different teaching modes, program administrators should consider offering multiple class options (e.g., face-to-face synchronous, online synchronous, online asynchronous or blended) to accommodate all choices.

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