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Title of Thesis:

From Classroom to Computer: How Transitioning from In-person to Online Language Learning Impacted the Motivation and Performance of Level 2 and 3 Spanish and French Students at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic forced educational institutions everywhere to migrate online as they rapidly attempted to adapt content to a virtual format. This study sought to evaluate the effect of this abrupt transition on the motivation and academic performance of 2nd and 3rd year Undergraduate Spanish and French students. An online questionnaire was completed by 45 foreign language students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in Trinidad and Tobago. The results thereof revealed no change in most students' motivation and performance. Regarding the relationship between these two variables, it was found that, although linked, motivation had little to no impact on academic performance and vice-versa. Based on these findings, it is recommended that students and lecturers work together to encourage motivation in the online classroom, and that course developers consider the difficulties reported by students, so as to allow their academic performance to improve during the COVID-19 crisis and in the post-COVID transition period. Student support should also be improved.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online Learning, Emergency Remote Teaching, Foreign Language Students, Motivation, Academic Performance

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INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a goal pursued by individuals worldwide. This process is influenced by two very important factors: motivation and academic performance.

Second language motivation is defined by Gardner et al. (1985) as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (10). Academic performance “involves factors such as the intellectual level, personality, motivation, skills, interests, study habits, self-esteem or the teacher-student relationship” (Lamas 354). It therefore considers the student’s motivation, suggesting that, in foreign language learning, these two are linked. Evidently, both have a significant impact on a student’s learning experience, as shown by Orhan Özen (2017) who confirms that “there are studies [showing] a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and achievement” (37). Hence, students’ motivation and their academic performance may be directly linked.

These variables must be examined regarding fully online learning. This may be defined as an academic setting “in which learners and education providers are physically separated from each other, and learning is essentially supported by online education technologies” (Wang and Chen 17). Sun (2014) posits that little empirical data has been published on FOL¹, and even less “on learner difficulties” (20). She also asserts that the lack of physical interaction between teachers and students, notably

¹. Fully online learning.

the feeling of isolation and disconnectedness, can negatively affect students' motivation.

Rationale

This study is necessary to add to the pre-existing body of knowledge in FLL². Extensive research has been conducted on the factors influencing students' motivation and performance. However, there needs to be further investigation into how shifting from in-person language learning to online language learning affected these variables. This study explores untapped data, considering the limitations of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the measures taken to facilitate learning at this time. Additionally, this research will aid in the evaluation of these measures' effectiveness, students' level of comfort and their ability to adjust to OL³, thereby highlighting potential areas for improvement.

Thesis statement

There is a need to examine the impact of transitioning to online learning on Undergraduate foreign language students' motivation and performance.

Parameters

This study focuses on 2nd and 3rd year Spanish and French Undergraduate students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in Trinidad and Tobago. The sample population was selected based on accessibility and experience. It was therefore restricted to Undergraduate students in their 2nd or 3rd year as they have been affected by migrating to OL during Semester

². Foreign language learning.

³. Online learning.

1 of the 2020-2021 academic year, an experience that 1st year students did not have. Both Spanish and French students were selected to solicit a wider range of opinions and to add to the validity of the research as this is a more diverse population comprising students of two languages instead of just one. The research was conducted in November 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, which ensures that the data collected is relevant and accurate. As there is much research documenting the transition from face-to-face to OL in other countries, this study focused on Trinidad and Tobago to give a Caribbean perspective on how university students are coping with this shift.

Research Question

What is the effect of transitioning from in-person foreign language classes to fully online foreign language classes on the motivation and performance of 2nd and 3rd year Undergraduate students of Spanish and French?

Aim

This study seeks to evaluate the impact of moving from in-person learning to online learning on the motivation and performance of 2nd and 3rd year Undergraduate Spanish and French students at the U.W.I.⁴ in St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. Furthermore, this research aims to highlight the challenges encountered by foreign language students during this transition. The study also seeks to present ways in which foreign language classes can be better adapted to an online setting in the future.

⁴. University of the West Indies.

Objectives

This work intends to

1. Evaluate the link between motivation and performance.
2. Examine the factors that motivate or demotivate 2nd and 3rd year Undergraduate students of Spanish and French at the University of West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.
3. Assess the effect of a change in learning environment on these students' motivation and performance.
4. Propose possible strategies for adapting foreign language learning to an online setting.

Methodology

This study employed both primary and secondary sources. The instrument of data collection utilised was an online questionnaire as this facilitates quick responses and eliminates the need for physical distribution, which is necessary since the COVID-19 pandemic prohibits social interaction. Its objectives were to solicit students' opinions on their OL experience and to evaluate how shifting to OL has affected their motivation and performance. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was divided into 3 sections and consisted of 20 questions. It combined close-ended and open-ended questions to direct participants' responses and obtain essential feedback while allowing for slight elaboration. In total, 45 responses were received from 45 participants composed of 2nd and 3rd year Spanish and French Undergraduate students at the U.W.I., St. Augustine. The research approach was quantitative and hypothetical.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One, “Literature Review”, gives a detailed comparative analysis of sources consulted in this investigation. Chapter Two, “Results”, contains a presentation of the study’s results. Chapter Three, “Discussion”, presents an interpretation of these findings, comparing them to previous research, including some of the works presented in Chapter One, and thereby responding to the Research Question.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Literature

This study aims to assess how transitioning from in-person to OL affected the motivation and performance of 2nd and 3rd year Spanish and French Undergraduate students at the U.W.I., St. Augustine. Similar works were examined and evaluated based on pertinence.

Foreign Language Learning before COVID-19

Foreign languages are typically taught through one of several approaches: face-to-face (traditional), online (remote or virtual), or blended (hybrid).

Face-to-face learning may be defined as learning that takes place in a physical setting, requiring the physical presence of a teacher and at least one student. FOL refers to “classes [that] use web-based resources and learning management systems for instruction, and [in which] face-to-face lessons do not take place” (Bailey and Lee 180). Although many definitions of the term “blended” or “hybrid learning” exist, “it generally involves the combination of face-to-face and computer-based learning” (180), which is the definition that will be used throughout this study.

OL has long been perceived as inferior to face-to-face instruction despite the existence of opposing research (Hodges et al. 3). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the term “online teaching/learning” may be a misnomer. According to Hodges et al. (2020), “effective online learning results from careful instructional design and planning, using a systematic model for design and development” (4). The modality currently employed, however, was not carefully planned but was the result of extreme, unprecedented circumstances demanding an immediate

response. Hodges et al. (2020) also estimate that “typical planning, preparation, and development time for a fully online university course is six to nine months before [course delivery]” (6).

Therefore, the current format should be referred to as “emergency remote teaching” (Hodges et al. 3) or ERT as “this careful design process [...] will be absent in most cases in these emergency shifts” (4). Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, the terms “online learning”, “virtual learning” and “remote learning” will be used interchangeably with “emergency remote teaching” to refer to the current format during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transitioning from Face-to-Face to Online

Global lockdowns due to the rampant spread of COVID-19 obligated teachers and students to adapt to a virtual mode of teaching. Face-to-face education was suddenly forced online, and this has significantly impacted education.

Khalil et al. (2020) examined medical students’ perspectives on this transition in Saudi Arabia. They revealed that students found online classes timesaving, allowing their performance to increase due to better time usage. Students were generally satisfied with OL and had positive attitudes towards it (Khalil et al. 7). Alshehri et al. (2020) also assessed this shift in Saudi Arabia, focusing on teaching. They highlighted that “it is more difficult to switch to online teaching on engineering courses or courses that require hands-on training [...] than courses deliver [*sic*] only theoretical concepts” (Alshehri et al. 188). Therefore, careful consideration had to be given to adapting courses requiring students’ physical presence to an online format.

Similarly, Lemay et al. (2021) evaluated Nepalese teachers’ experience of transitioning to ERT. Although most teachers surveyed had never taught an online class before (Lemay et al. 4),

“a substantially smaller majority felt that their school and themselves fully prepared [to do so]” (5). More than half of the respondents were also able to find sufficient resources for online teaching (5), indicating a relatively successful transition. Likewise, Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) concluded that “the transition from the traditional to the online education systems at [a private school in Georgia] was successful” (7). Nevertheless, this was not the case everywhere. Marshall et al. (2020) state that “the extraordinary circumstances teachers faced in light of the pandemic prevented them — and their students — from making a normal transition to remote education” (47) and that “teachers found several aspects of teaching to be more difficult during [ERT] than during face-to-face instruction” (49). For instance, in FLL, it is significantly more difficult to communicate orally online due to a bad internet connection or a slow device. Thus, transferring education from in-person to virtual was smoother in some places than in others.

Challenges of Online Learning

This section explores the unique obstacles faced by teachers and students in attempting to adjust to ERT during COVID-19.

Technical Issues

Research suggests that technology presented some of the most common challenges, including a lack of technological *savoir-faire*. Bailey and Lee (2020) affirm that “novice teachers [unfamiliar] with online teaching have expressed frustration with e-learning” (189).

Corresponding to this, Alshehri et al. (2020) found that “Zoom is heavily used by 65% of the respondents [while] 20% prefer to use Google Classrooms due to its simplicity, as it does not

contain many tools” (991), which may indicate the presence of a technological barrier. Students also struggled with “operating the applications and platforms used for OL” as they have “low digital literacy” (63), as posited by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) when investigating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Indonesia.

Another obstacle was access to technological devices and/or to the Internet. Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) revealed that 62% of Georgian homes have computer access (2). However, other places are not as fortunate. Kalloo et al. (2020) highlighted that approximately 60,000 students in Trinidad and Tobago lacked sufficient resources and support to access online education (453). This puts Trinidad and Tobago in the same category as other countries lacking sufficient e-learning resources to maintain teaching and learning during COVID-19. According to Sistema (2020), these countries are likely to see “adverse effects on [their] education sector” (5) as a result. Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) summarise this issue: “without adequate facilities, the teachers cannot carry out an interactive online learning” (66). Moreover, Adnan and Anwar (2020) confirm that “online learning can be effective in digitally advanced countries [...] which is why in Pakistan it is ineffective” (46) as “most students do not have access to high speed or reliable internet services and are thus struggling with [OL]” (49). They also highlight that students who attend online class via smartphones are often unable to access and benefit from a significant amount of content (46). Hence, no access to devices and to the Internet impeded OL.

Internet connectivity issues were also prominent during this transition. Khalil et al. (2020) list “slow internet connectivity and communication software failure” and “very frequent internet disconnection”, among others (6). The students interviewed agreed that “[time was wasted] every day because of technical problems” (6). Akhter (2020) supports this, saying that many students lack an internet connection strong enough to facilitate online courses and

therefore cannot attend classes, which makes their learning experience “problematic” (5). In FLL, these technological problems can be a major barrier to virtual oral communication. Connectivity issues were thus a significant challenge that impacted the quality of virtual education delivered.

Student Engagement

Student engagement was another issue. This term may be generally defined as “the effort and commitment that students give to their learning” (Krause and Coates). Studies suggest that the remote mode of teaching decreases student engagement and participation. Kahn et al. (2016) argue that OL environments challenge students’ ability to self-regulate their learning and that students who struggle with this will have difficulty engaging as learners (204). Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) posit that teachers have trouble engaging low-motivated, passive students in an OL setting as some do not focus and even go to sleep during virtual sessions (67). The English language teachers surveyed also indicated that OL creates a problem for students’ language proficiency because they do not use English daily inside and outside of the classroom (67). This highlights another aspect of student engagement: the importance of daily practice in the target language, particularly difficult for students learning foreign languages virtually. OL may therefore reduce student engagement.

Time Management

Another obstacle was time management. OL provides flexibility as it allows the student to organise classes according to personal commitments. Gillett-Swan (2017), however, argues that this increased flexibility can also cause distractions and an inability to fully participate in scheduled weekly classes (27). Namely, “commitments such as caring for young children or being called into work can affect the attendance and participation of students in regularly scheduled tutorials/live sessions” (27). Rajab et al. (2020) also reported that, of 208 students and faculty members surveyed, 35% listed time management as one of the barriers to online education created by the COVID-19 pandemic (5). Thus, students had trouble organising their time to accommodate online classes.

Physical Health

ERT has challenged the human body in unfamiliar ways. Long hours spent hunched over at a desk, typing, and focusing on a bright LED screen has harmed students’ and teachers’ physical health (Realyvásquez-Vargas et al. 2).

Physiological issues caused by OL include migraines, eye strain, shoulder pain, neck strain, a lack of physical activity, substance abuse, and sleep disruption. Maican and Cocoradă (2021) revealed that many students experienced “stress, migraines and concentration or attention troubles” (14). Bhattacharya et al. (2021) pointed out that it is now routine for children to spend up to 12 hours daily attending e-classes in front of a screen (1709). Shamila Raheem, PRO⁵ for

⁵. Public Relations Officer.

the NCPTA⁶ of Trinidad and Tobago, highlights that “[children] are having eye and back issues from too much screen time” along with other “physical issues” (Paul 2021). Bhattacharya et al. (2021) explain that OL devices emit short high energy waves that can damage the eye’s retinal cells, thereby rendering the individual vulnerable to digital eye strain (DES) or computer vision syndrome, a group of various eye problems ranging from dry eye to age-related macular degeneration (1709). Mowatt et al. (2017) support this claim as, out of 409 medical students, more than half suffered from eye strain, eye burn, blurred vision, neck pain and shoulder pain. Hence, the online learner during COVID-19 risks developing severe eye problems. Mheidly et al. (2020) also report that neck pain can be a serious issue “due to the prolonged and distorted positioning [of the neck] when using these devices” (3). This position “may progressively lead to stresses on the cervical spine” and “strain the ligaments, muscles, and tendons of the vertebral column” (3). Neck strain then, is another problem caused by fully virtual learning.

Students are also less physically active outside of a school environment (Brazendale et al. 2020). Romero-Blanco et al. (2020) found that physical activity intensity decreased during COVID-19, while the consumption of unhealthy food and sedentary behaviour increased. Physical activity among university students also decreased (2). Further, substance abuse increased among Russian and Belarusian university students under quarantine/self-isolation conditions (Gritsenko et al. 2020). These had “a significantly higher rate of alcohol use than those not restricted” since “substance abuse [...] tends to be increased as a means of coping and self-medication” (Garvey et al. 2020). Moreover, Son et al. (2020) revealed that because of COVID-19, most participants’ sleep patterns were altered, with over one third reporting severe

⁶. National Council of the Parent-Teacher Association.

disruptions (8), supported by Garvey et al. (2021). Hence, moving to OL has notably impacted students' physical health.

Mental Health

Students are having trouble mentally coping with transitioning from face-to-face to ERT.

Gritsenko et al. (2020) attest that pandemics such as COVID-19 “increase psychological stress; and, the consequences of quarantine lead to emotional disturbance, depression, irritability, insomnia, anger, and emotional exhaustion among other health and mental health conditions.” This is supported by Irawan et al. (2020) who posit that “public health emergencies can have many psychological effects on students, which can be expressed in the form of [anxiety and fear]” (54), and by Romero-Blanco et al. (2020) as they found increased anxiety levels among 18- to 34-year-olds during the lockdown period (2).

Further, Maican and Cocoradă (2021) noted that “high-achieving students score higher for anxiety than low academic achievers” (16). Islam et al. (2020) also revealed that students concerned with falling behind academically were almost twice as likely to be depressed than other students (6). Hence, students who put pressure on themselves to perform well therefore generally suffer more from anxiety. Shamila Raheem attests that because of ERT, S.E.A.⁷ students, on whom overwhelming pressure is placed, are experiencing “mental [...] issues, frustration and anxiety, [and] stress because they don't understand the work” (Paul 2021). She adds that “some are suffering from depression” (Paul 2021). Evidently, more females suffer from

⁷. Secondary Entrance Assessment – a high-stakes examination that primary school children in the Caribbean are required to sit in order to enter the secondary education system. The results of the S.E.A. determine which secondary school a child will attend for at least the next five years of his or her life.

anxiety and depression than males (Garvey et al. 2, Méndez-Giménez et al. 115), and younger persons seem to be more psychologically affected by the extended closure of institutions and schools, and a limitation of their social and leisure activities (Méndez-Giménez et al. 115). This is evident in the case of a 13-year-old girl in Trinidad who attempted suicide because of “online schooling and the resultant pressure placed on [students] to perform” (Paul 2021). Concerning employed students, this anxiety stems from financial difficulty (Garvey et al. 7, Irawan et al. 56, Islam et al. 8), lack of interpersonal communication (Irawan et al. 55) and of social support (57), and fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus (55) among other causes. However, students living with family seem to experience lower levels of anxiety (Islam et al. 8, Husky et al. 1). Anxiety and depression are therefore significant effects of OL on students.

Besides these two mental ailments, students are experiencing burnout. According to Mheidly et al. (2020):

Burnout is a mental health state that results from work-related distress, involving a continuous reaction to persistent interpersonal stressors. [Major contributing factors] include overwhelming exhaustion and detachment. In addition, a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment may ensue. (2)

Younger students are not exempt from burnout, as Shamila Raheem states that Standard 5⁸ students in Trinidad and Tobago are “burnt out and just plain fed up” (Paul 2021). Nevertheless, Zhang et al. (2020) observed that learning burnout occurred more among higher-level students (6), corresponding with Zis et al. (2021) who noted burnout in 1 in 5 medical students (5). Furthermore, Brooks et al. (2020) posit that the “psychological impact of quarantine is wide-

⁸. The highest level of the Caribbean primary school system and the level at which students sit the S.E.A. examination. Students are typically 11 to 12 years old when they are in Standard 5.

ranging, substantial and can be long-lasting” (919). Hence, the abrupt migration to ERT has harmed students’ mental health.

Social Interaction

Remote teaching and learning may adversely affect social interaction among teachers and students. The prohibition of physical social gatherings during COVID-19 has negatively affected both groups and is a barrier to effective learning.

Romero-Blanco et al. (2020) reported that Spanish university students’ social lives were limited due to the lockdown (2). Similarly, Adnan and Anwar (2020) found that “lack of interaction with the instructor” and “absence of traditional classroom socialization” were among the difficulties reported by tertiary students in Pakistan (49). They observed that “78.6% of students felt that face to face [*sic*] contact with their instructor was important for effective learning which is missing in distance learning mode” (49). This is supported by Aboagye et al. (2020) who affirm that “the conventional classroom teaching where students and lecturers interact face-to-face is very key to promote socialisation” (6). Furthermore, Maican and Cocoradă (2021) observed that “students [reported] negative emotions generated by the lack of interaction with peers and the teacher” (14) when surveying students at a Romanian comprehensive university. Wright (2017) posits that “another obvious disadvantage of asynchronous lessons is the lack of verbal and non-verbal cues that may enrich teacher-student communication, particularly in language learning” (65), explaining that “gestures, body language and other audible cues enhance classroom communication” (65). This evidence highlights that socialisation is essential to learning, specifically to FLL.

Benefits of Online Learning

Although there is significantly less research documenting ERT's strengths, they exist.

Dhawan (2020) lists several benefits of remote learning. These include its accessibility, affordability, and flexibility (Dhawan 6, Paudel 79) as it can accommodate students in rural areas, is generally less costly than institution-based learning, saves students money spent on transportation and accommodation, and allows them to schedule their time accordingly to complete courses online (6). Paudel (2021) also found that more than half of the students and teachers surveyed praised OL for its flexibility (79). Concerning the current pandemic, Dhawan (2020) posits that “[OL] serves as a panacea” during the current pandemic (6) as global lockdowns to protect public health and safety forbid social gathering. Additionally, Paudel (2021) revealed that most respondents “found online courses beneficial for promoting online research, connecting the practitioners to the global community and getting huge resources of knowledge” (79), highlighting other strengths of remote teaching.

Regarding learning, Dhawan (2020) argues that “e-learning methods enable us to customize our procedures and processes based on [learners’ needs]” (13). This corresponds with Bailey and Lee (2020) who state that “a primary characteristic of online teaching is that activities can be centred on the needs of learners and improve language learning” (181). Since foreign languages are a flexible discipline, they can be effectively adapted to an online format, providing students with ways to develop and strengthen their language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) remotely. Mahaye (2020) highlights that technology allows immediate feedback from instructors, as well as the creation of virtual classrooms that facilitate participant interaction, thereby promoting social and collaborative learning anywhere (14). He also notes

that language students can practise with their classmates online. The current virtual modality can thus largely stimulate the foreign language student and facilitate effective learning.

Motivation in Online Foreign Language Learning

This section examines the various factors that affected student motivation during the shift to ERT⁹.

As mentioned previously, second language motivation is defined by Gardner et al. (1985) as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (10). A foreign language student must therefore be motivated to pursue his or her efforts in learning the target language(s). Two main types of motivation are: intrinsic and extrinsic. According to Orhan Özen (2017), intrinsic motivation derives itself from the individual’s interest, curiosity, and needs (36) and is therefore promoted by internal factors. The enjoyment or pleasure derived from completing the action is sufficient and thus, “no additional motive or punishment is needed” (36). Conversely, extrinsic motivation is promoted by external factors. Orhan Özen states that if the drive behind an individual’s behaviour lies in his environment, that is, if he is not motivated by the action itself but by the reward of said action, this is extrinsic motivation (36). Extrinsic motivation comes from the action’s result while intrinsic motivation comes from the process of completing the action. Sudarsan (2018) found that, among 38 Spanish students surveyed, “those who stated that motivation did have an influence [on their learning process] mainly exhibited intrinsic motivation” (32). Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, students are dealing with unprecedented

⁹. Emergency remote teaching.

conditions. Gonzalez et al. (2020) suggest that “students might be motivated by their intrinsic responsibility in a very confused [*sic*] situation and work hard to contribute as much as they can to solve the problem that higher education is facing” (21), which is supported by Bawa (2020).

Student motivation is a key factor in remote learning, especially during COVID-19.

According to Adnan and Anwar (2020), there is a need for motivation in OL. They explain:

In traditional classes, students usually actively participate in academic activities due to their face-to-face engagement with instructor and class fellows. 71.4% of students reported that learning in the conventional classroom was more motivating than distance learning. (49)

A special effort should therefore be made towards motivating online learners, a burden which tends to fall solely on teachers’ shoulders. Lemay et al. (2021) revealed that “teachers’ [*sic*] felt that students needed more motivation support” (6), which corresponds to Marshall et al. (2020) who posit that “for many teachers, the lack of real-time communication made it difficult to keep students motivated, especially younger students” (48). Peer interaction is also very important in the case of foreign language students who are encouraged to practise speaking the target language(s) with their colleagues. Wright (2017) reports that “a larger number of students generally [associated] in-class lessons with higher motivation [...] primarily due to better understanding, valued classroom interaction with the lecturer and peers, and input from the lecturer” (70). This is supported by Niemi and Kousa (2020) who attest that “students [...] found it more motivating have [*sic*] an opportunity to communicate face-to-face” (355). Thus, social interaction is vital to student motivation.

There are also external environmental factors hindering students’ motivation. Žižanović et al. (2021) affirm that both students’ and teachers’ motivation declined after time (234). They

highlighted that students' motivation may decrease because of lack of time management skills, loss of daily school routine, increased academic responsibilities, a long wait time for feedback from the teacher, and domestic duties such as caring for siblings or doing household chores (235). In contrast, students may feel more motivated to learn and succeed academically if they are in a competitive atmosphere (236). Peer collaboration and support are therefore essential in online learning.

Another important element is the student's ability to self-motivate. Nevertheless, this may not suffice amidst the uncertain, scary conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Niemi and Kousa (2020) posit that "even if the students are highly motivated and self-regulated high achievers, distance learning can still be difficult, isolating, and discouraging for them" (355). Sun (2014) affirms that "the resultant feelings of disconnectedness and isolation can affect students' attitudes towards [OL], and thus can also put a significant damper on student's motivation and enthusiasm" (21). Son et al. (2020) also confirm that "mental health issues are the leading impediment to academic success. Mental illness can affect students' motivation, concentration and social interactions—crucial factors for students to succeed in higher education" (1). Students require a strong support system to be motivated and achieve their academic goals. This is especially true concerning students learning virtually as social interaction is severely limited by the pandemic.

This is not to say that online classes are incapable of stimulating students' motivation. In fact, some students preferred the virtual modality. Wright (2017) confirms:

A smaller number of students were more motivated by [...] the online lesson. Their reasons for preferring the online lesson included speed and ease of completing the work, with flexibility of time and place also being a major factor. (70)

Thus, OL's benefits may boost student motivation and encourage them to learn. Wright (2017) further states that "students also cited motivational content, novelty, and the fun of using the Internet as [motivating factors]" (70), which indicates a certain fascination with the concept of learning remotely and receiving education without attending physical lectures. According to Khalil et al. (2020), students may also be motivated by "the benefit of mastering the content in less time compared to campus learning" (7). Thus, there is research reflecting both that online classes may stimulate student motivation and that they may hinder it.

Academic Performance in Online Foreign Language Learning

There are not many studies on academic performance during the transition from face-to-face to ERT. The existing few report mixed results.

Khalil et al. (2020) reported that medical students' academic performance increased as online classes allowed them to use their time better (5). These findings are supported by Santiago et al. (2021), and Gonzalez et al. (2020) who saw "a significant positive effect of COVID-19 confinement on students' performance" (19). They therefore expect "higher scores [...] due to the COVID-19 confinement" (21). Yokoyama (2019) argues that unfamiliarity with OL devices may negatively affect students' academic performance (3). Hence, tech-savvy students may perform better academically in a virtual context.

As with motivation, environmental stimuli may affect students' academic performance. Dim lightning, increased noise, and either elevated or decreased temperature negatively impact students' academic performance (Realyvásquez-Vargas et al. 2020). Additionally, Sani et al. (2020) posit that greater student support may boost academic performance (118). Conversely,

they argue that academic performance may be impeded by burnout caused by “the lack of regular communication between students and personal tutors” (117). Santiago et al. (2021) also noted that neither delivery mode(s) nor class size seemed to impact students’ performance.

Therefore, further investigation is needed to document how the abrupt shift to remote learning impacted academic performance, and to determine the relationship between academic performance and student motivation.

Necessity of the Present Study

Although this research examines students’ and teachers’ experiences transitioning from a traditional academic setting to a virtual setting, there are still angles left to be considered. There is not yet data reflecting what this transition was like on foreign language students in the Caribbean and specifically, in Trinidad and Tobago. Further investigation is therefore needed.

CHAPTER TWO

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of a questionnaire that was distributed via Google Forms and solicited anonymous responses from 45 participants on their experience of abruptly migrating from face-to-face to FOLL¹⁰.

Demographic Questions

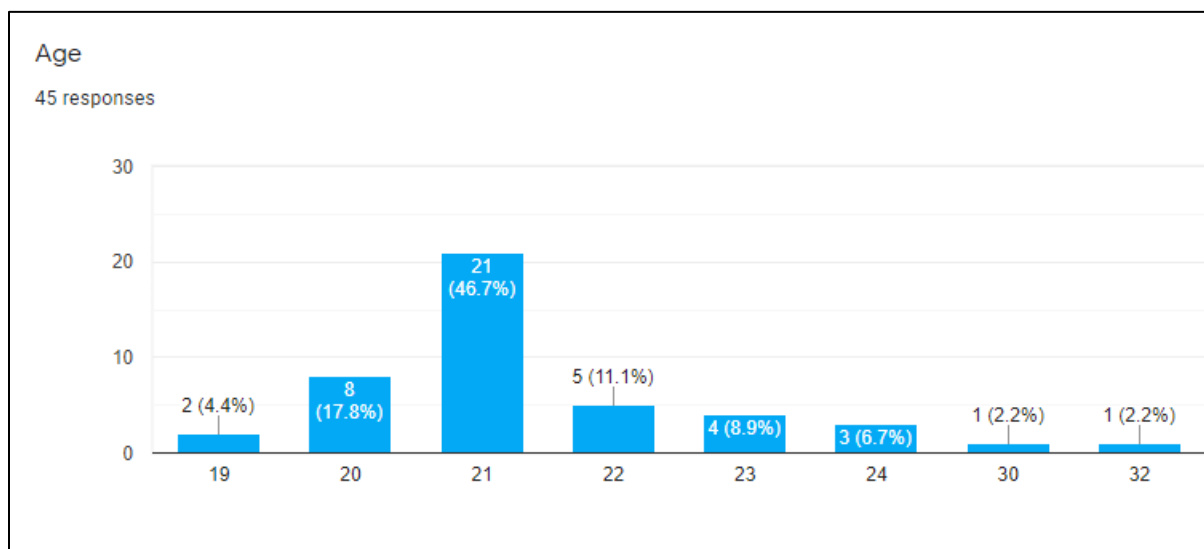


Fig. 1. Bar Graph showing Participants' Ages.

The responses to Question 1 indicate that most participants (95.6%) were between the ages of 19 to 24 years old (see fig. 1).

¹⁰. Fully online language learning.

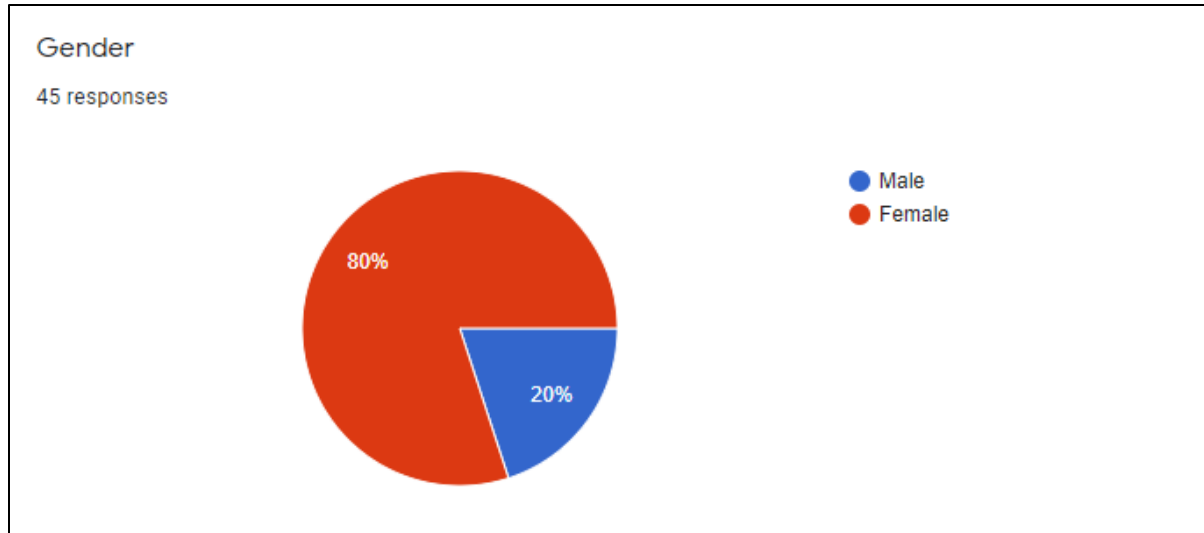


Fig. 2. Pie Chart showing Participants' Gender.

Question 2's results show that most participants (80%) were female (see fig. 2).

Question 3 enquired as to the participants' Major(s) and/or Minor(s). As the sample population was selected based mainly on the field of study, all participants are French and/or Spanish students. Most students (22.2%) pursued a double Major in both languages while others paired either Spanish or French with other subjects such as Linguistics, Brazilian Studies, and International Relations.

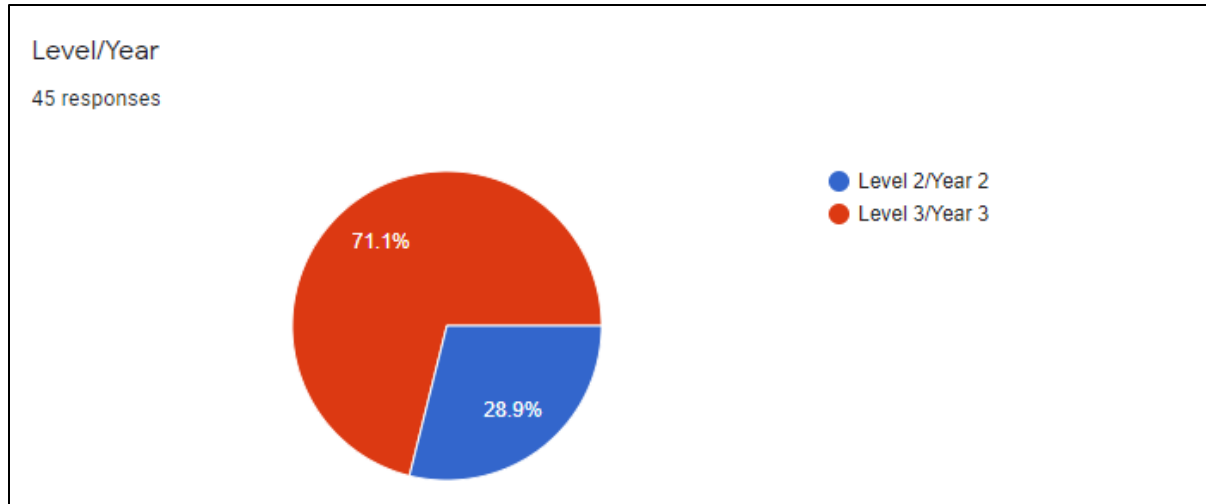


Fig. 3. Pie Chart showing Participants' Level.

Most participants (71.1%) were 3rd year Undergraduate students, as per their responses to Question 4 (see fig. 3).

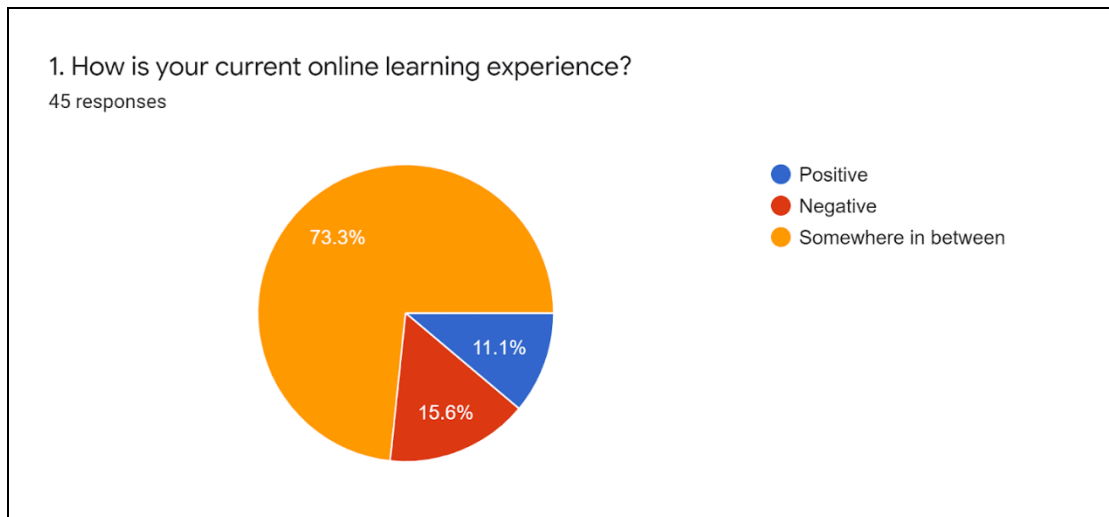
Motivation

Fig. 4. Pie Chart showing Participants' Opinions of their Online Experience

Question 5 begins the section on motivation (see fig. 4). It asked participants to describe their online experience, to which most (73.3%) indicated that their experience had been a mixture of positive and negative.

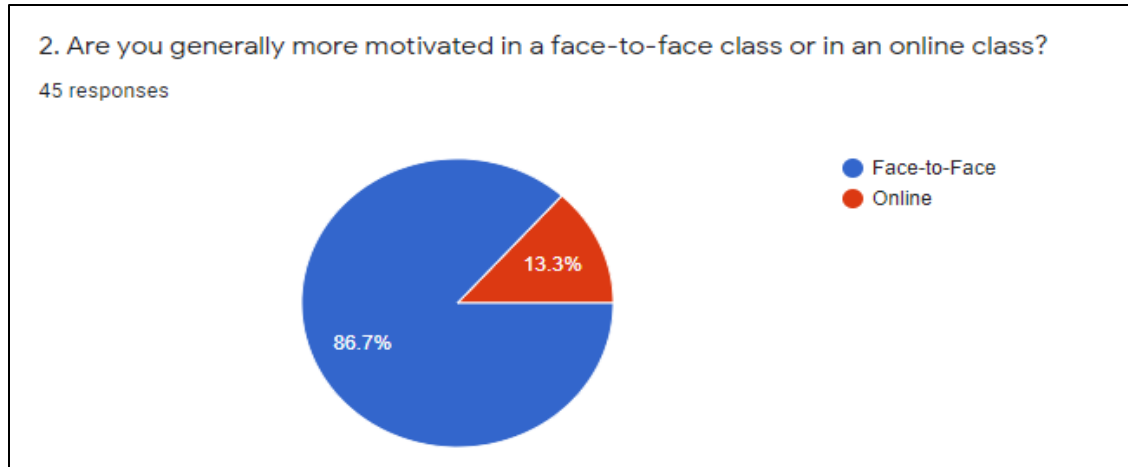


Fig. 5. Pie Chart showing in which Class Setting Participants are More Motivated.

The results of Question 6 reveal that almost all participants (86.7%) were more motivated in face-to-face class (see fig. 5).

Question 7 asked participants why they were more motivated in a face-to-face class. Most cited the lecturer's physical presence promoting focus (94.9%), the classroom environment being conducive to work (84.6%), encouragement from group collaboration (53.8%), and overstimulation from the online environment (41%).

Question 8 asked participants why they were more motivated in an online class. All credited virtual class' accessibility (100%). Most cited feeling confident behind a screen (75%), overstimulation from the classroom environment (75%) and the ease of submitting class assignments (62.5%).

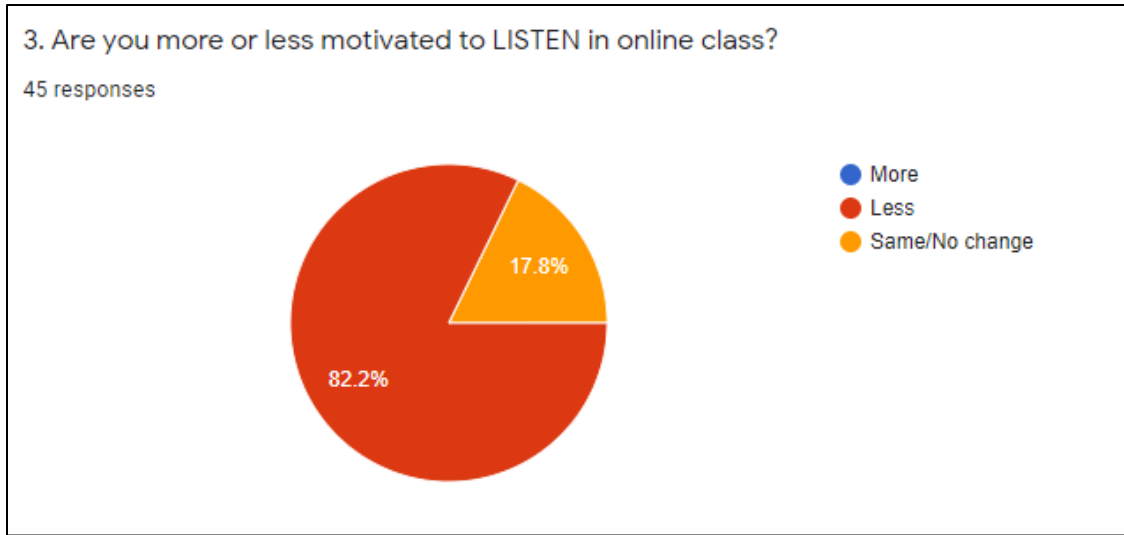


Fig. 6. Pie Chart showing Participants' Motivation to Listen in Online Class.

Question 9 shows that most participants (82.2%) felt less motivated and that none felt more motivated to listen in virtual class (see fig. 6).

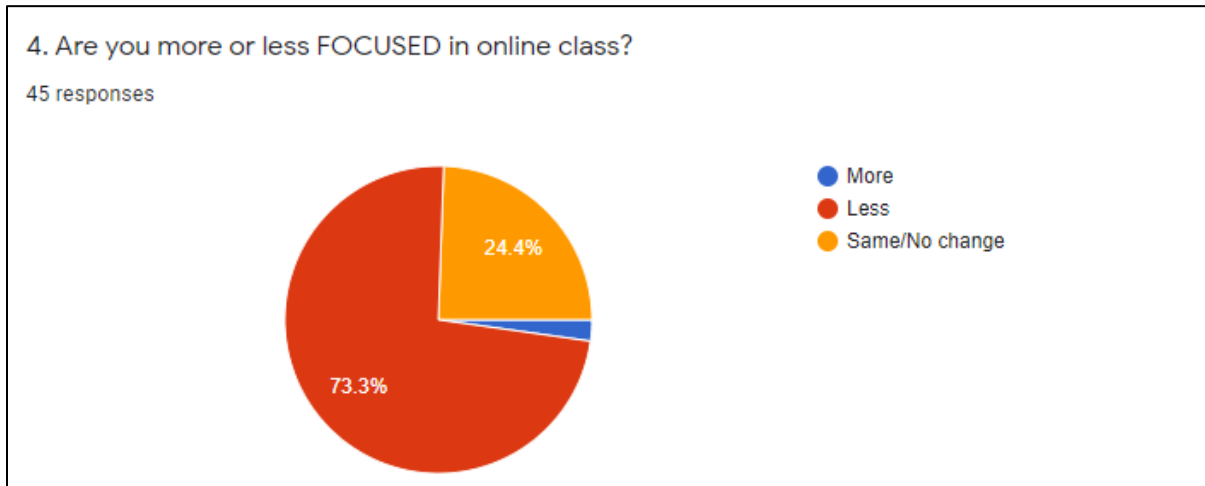


Fig. 7. Pie Chart showing Participants' Level of Focus in Online Class.

Question 10's results show that most participants (73.3%) were less focused in online class while only 1 participant (2.22%) felt more focused (see fig. 7).

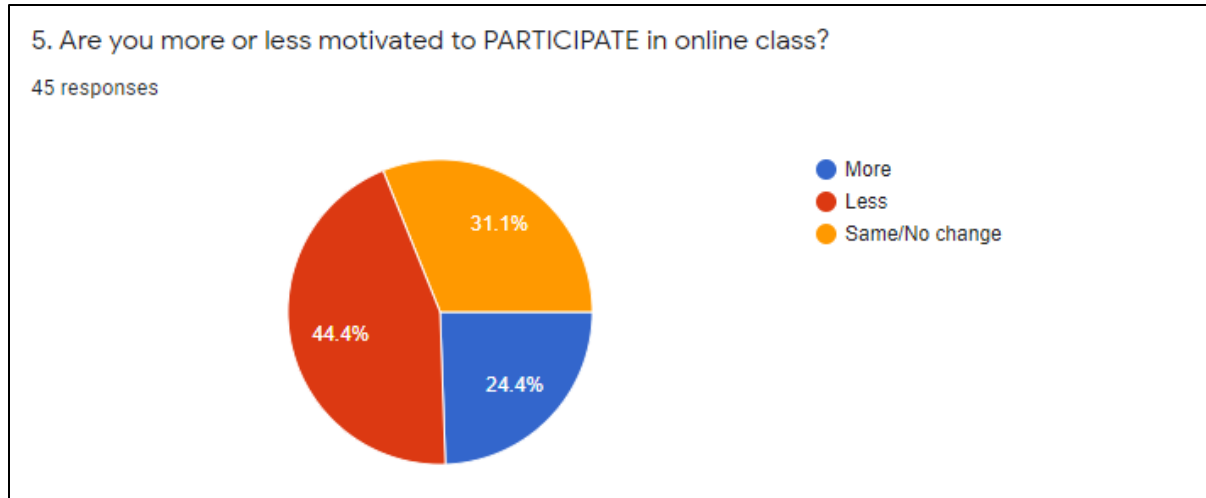


Fig. 8. Pie Chart showing Participants' Motivation to Participate in Online Class.

The results of Question 11 indicate that most participants (44.4%) felt less motivated to participate in online class (see fig. 8).

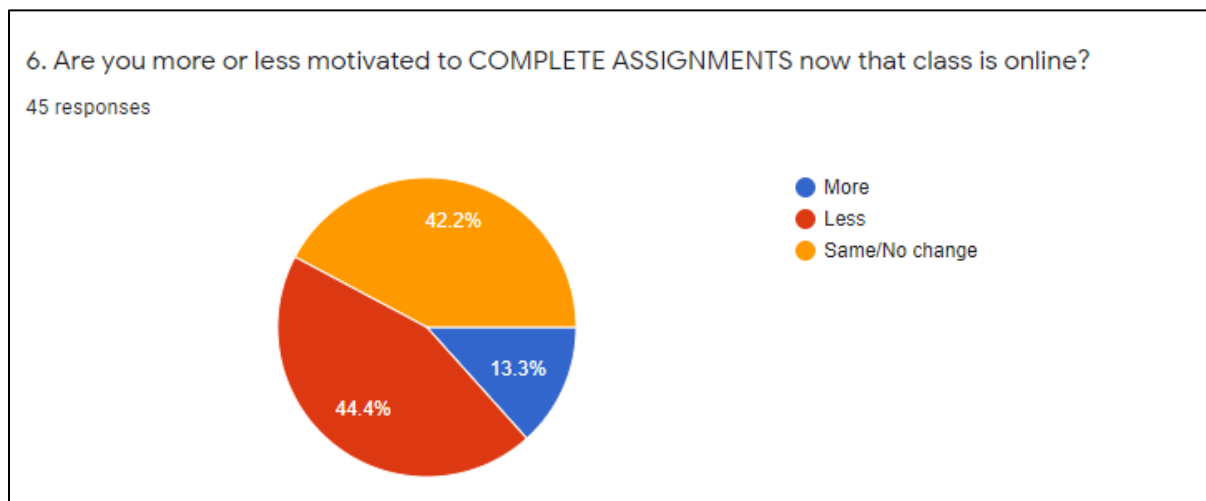


Fig. 9. Pie Chart showing Participants' Motivation to Complete Assignments.

Participants' responses to Question 12 show that most (44.4%) felt less motivated while many (42.2%) saw no change in their motivation to complete assignments (see fig. 9).

Table 1

Challenges Encountered by Students while Transitioning to Remote Learning

Challenge Encountered	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Mental and/or physical strain	43	95.5
Technical issues	38	84.4
Time management	32	71.1
Home environment/lack of support or understanding	29	64.4
Lack of social stimulation	26	57.7
Assignment overload	1	02.2
Additional responsibilities due to the pandemic (forced to work, to take care of children while parents work etc.)	1	02.2
Lecturers have become extremely inconsiderate	1	02.2

Question 13 asked participants to select challenges encountered while migrating to FOL¹¹ (see table 1). Most (95.5%) experienced mental and/or physical strain. Several had technical issues (84.4%), difficulties with time management (71.1%) and lacked a suitable home environment for FOL, and/or received a lack of understanding from their families (64.4%). More than half (57.7%) suffered from no social stimulation.

¹¹. Fully online learning.

Table 2

Benefits Encountered by Students while Transitioning to Remote Learning

Benefit Experienced	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Financial benefits	31	68.8
Becoming more tech savvy	23	51.1
Family bonding	9	20.0
Time management	6	13.3
Mental and/or physical benefits	5	11.1
More free time (lack of commute, can learn new life skills that can be applied later on)	2	04.4
Not having to get ready for class (shower, get dressed etc.)	1	02.2
Increased interaction with classmates outside of class hours	1	02.2
Being able to multitask	1	02.2
Attending class while at work	1	02.2
No benefits	5	11.1

Question 14 asked participants to select benefits experienced shifting to virtual class (see table 2). Most (68.8%) experienced financial benefits. More than half (51.1%) became more tech savvy. A small number (20%) bonded more with their families.

Performance

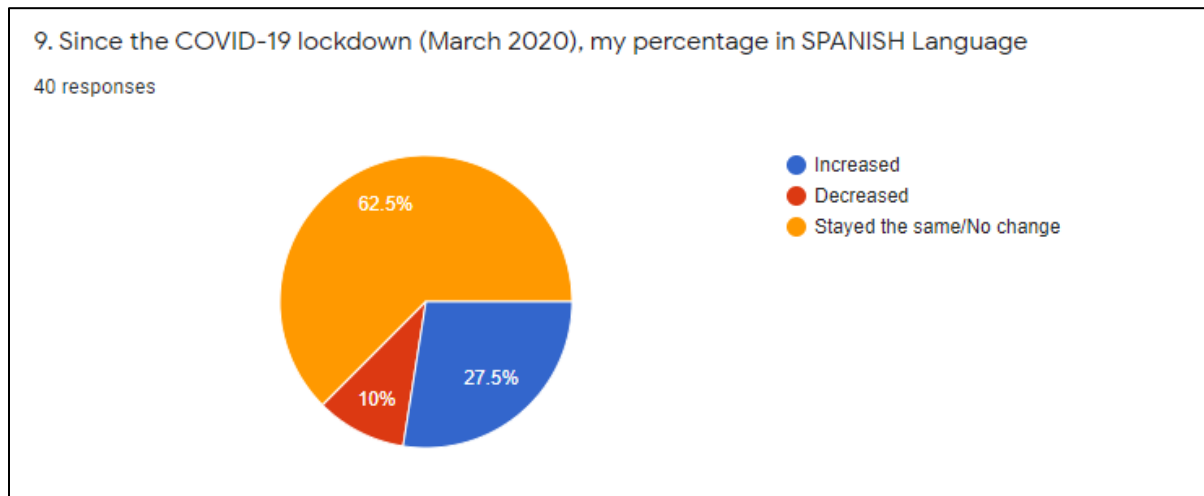


Fig. 10. Pie Chart showing Participants' Performance in Spanish Language since March 2020.

Question 15 asked if participants' performance in Spanish Language changed since March 2020, when the U.W.I.'s St. Augustine campus closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see fig. 10). Of the 40 respondents, most (62.5%) reported no change in their performance. A smaller number (27.5%) reported an increase.

Question 16 asked participants why their performance in Spanish Language changed or not since March 2020. Of the 30 respondents, 16.6% were unaware as to the reasons behind their performance. 16.6% did not change the amount of effort they dedicated to Spanish, 10% credited being able to research more and 6.6% cited a lack of motivation. Other responses included being able to find material more easily, having more time to prepare and complete assignments, having less study time, assignments and class content being manageable, lecturers' flexibility and leniency, reduced pressure from not being in a physical room with the lecturer, lack of social

interaction with Spanish native speakers, reduced focus, and desire to participate in class, and low enthusiasm.

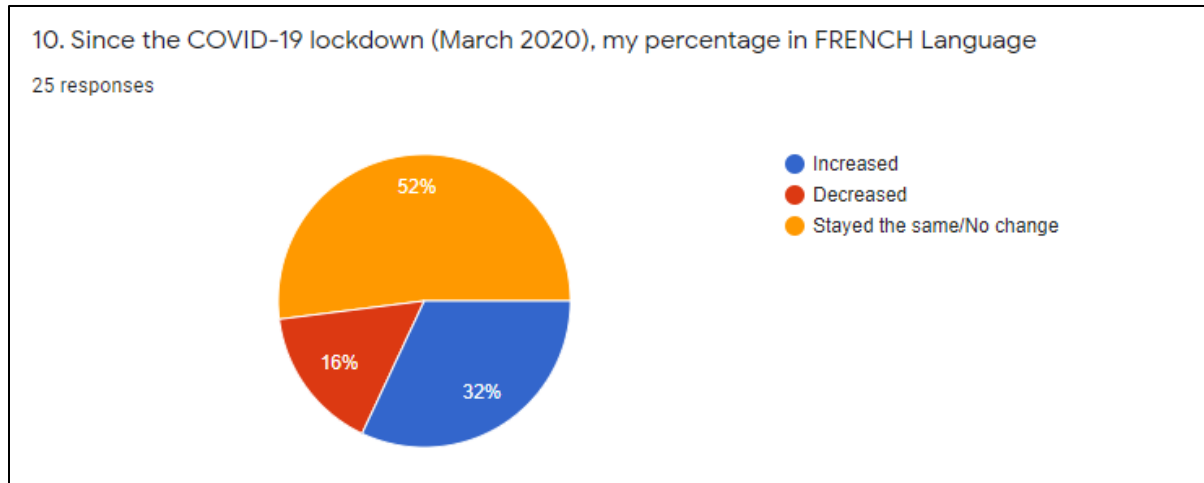


Fig. 11. Pie Chart showing Participants' Performance in French Language since March 2020.

Question 17 asked participants whether their performance in French Language had changed since March 2020 (see fig. 11). Of the 25 respondents, most (52%) indicated no change. A smaller number (32%) reported an increase.

Question 18 enquired as to the reasons behind participants' performance in French Language. Of the 20 respondents, 15% were unaware of the reason(s) behind their performance, 15% indicated that their performance was due to having help from online resources during classes and exams, and 15% credited being less nervous in their home environment. Other reasons included material being easier to find, having more time to study/complete homework, the French courses, timetable, and assignments being overwhelming, having little time to understand course content, not putting forward sufficient effort, adapting to the workload, and maintaining the same work ethic, and improving in certain areas of the language but not as much

in others.

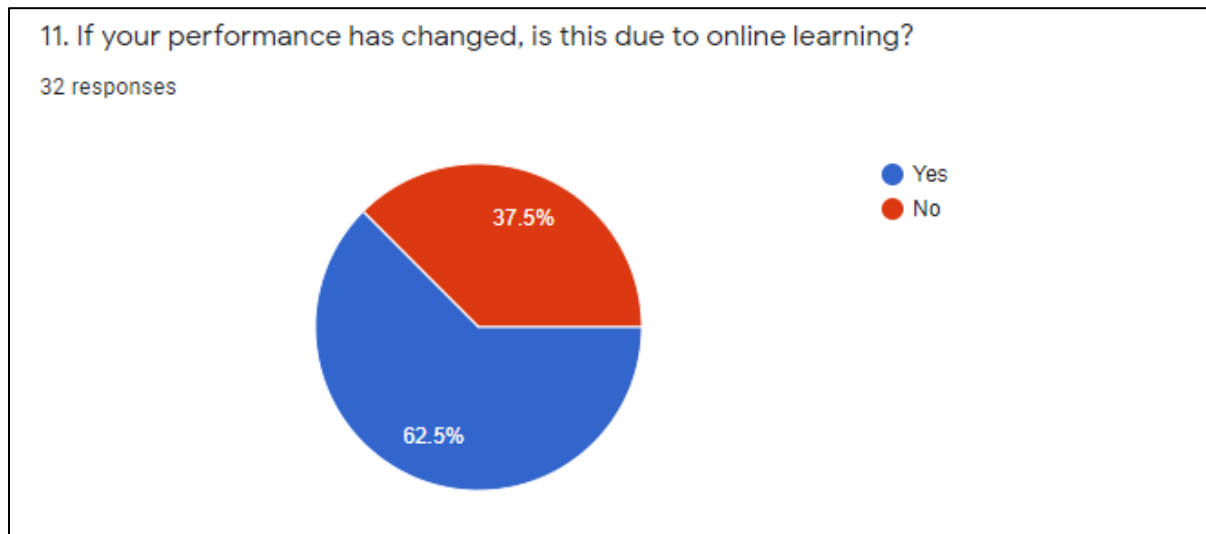


Fig. 12. Pie Chart showing whether Participants' Performance is due to Online Learning.

Most of the 32 respondents (62.5%) to Question 19 believed that OL was the reason behind their performance in Spanish and/or French Language (see fig. 12).

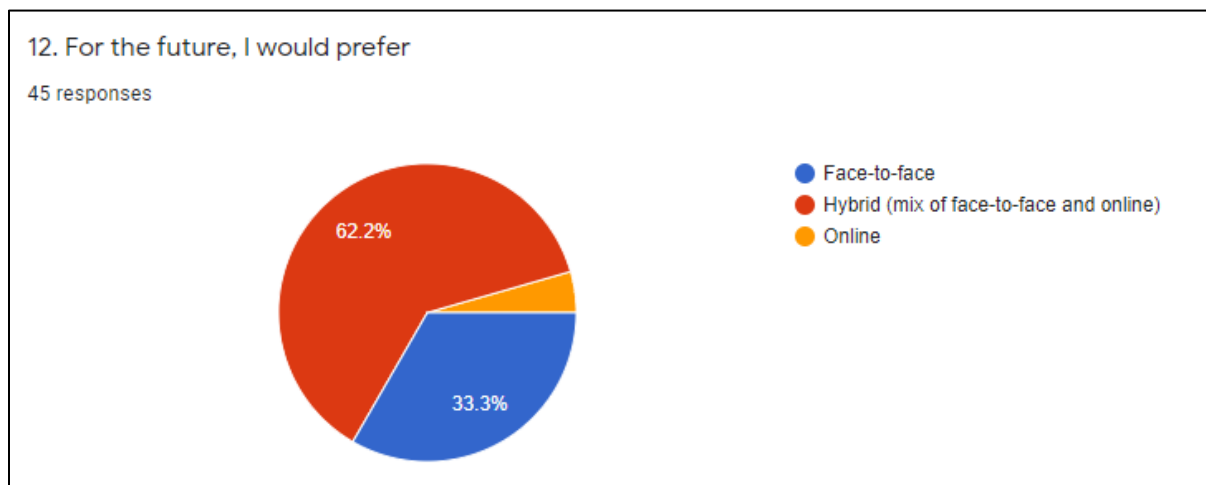


Fig. 13. Pie Chart showing Participants' Preferred Mode of Learning for the Future.

Most participants (62.2%) prefer blended learning for the future, as per their responses to Question 20 (see fig. 13).

CHAPTER THREE

DISCUSSION

This study evaluated the impact of abruptly shifting from face-to-face to FOL on the motivation and performance of 2nd and 3rd year Undergraduate foreign language students.

Most respondents were female, which was expected as there is generally a strong female presence in foreign languages, especially in Spanish and French (Wightman 11). This correlates with Wightman (2020) who noted that “women obtain foreign language degrees more than twice as frequently as men do” (14). Additionally, the present study found that most females majored in Spanish, again consistent with Wightman (12). This is perhaps due to Spanish being a compulsory subject up to the Form 3 level in Trinidad and Tobago’s secondary schools. Hence, students may feel better equipped to pursue Spanish at a tertiary level than French.

Motivation

Overall, ERT was both positive and negative, which may indicate that some students successfully adapted, and some did not. Most respondents felt more motivated in face-to-face class. This was attributed to the lecturer’s physical presence, and the classroom environment being conducive to work and focus, which is supported by Wright (2017). This therefore suggests that, as ERT lacks these characteristics, it may not stimulate student motivation. Thus, in future, students and lecturers should actively try to increase motivation in the virtual setting. The lecturers’ attitudes play a part in boosting student motivation as it was reported that motivation was increased due to lecturers’ flexibility and leniency. In addition, the students who

were more motivated in remote class attributed this to its accessibility, consistent with Mahdy (6), and to feeling more confident behind a screen. Rios et al. (2018) also noted that “introverts expressed greater readiness to participate via text chat” (6). Hence, introverted students may be generally more motivated by the virtual modality.

The present study observed that females were generally more motivated than males. This finding may be due to the sample population consisting of mostly females. Furthermore, many participants were less motivated to listen, focus, participate and complete assignments now that learning is virtual, perhaps due to challenges encountered during the transition. These include technical issues (Wright 67), an uncomfortable or unsuitable home environment (Khalil et al. 6, Son et al. 9), mental and physical strain, and lack of social stimulation. Interestingly, most of those more motivated in virtual class experienced no change in their motivation to listen and to focus during lectures. This may mean that these students were intrinsically motivated and able to self-motivate independent of external changes such as a shift in modality. This finding was expected as previous literature shows that remote learning does not always encourage student engagement (Kahn et al. 204).

The current study found that most foreign language students surveyed recorded little to no change in their motivation. This may be because the change to ERT did not affect this sample group to the extent that it would have impacted students of another discipline. Orhan Özen’s (2017) argument that “the importance of motivation [...] varies according to the sample group” (45) may therefore be correct; examining a different sample population may yield different results regarding motivation.

Performance

Most Spanish students' performance showed no change, as did most French students' performance. This is consistent with Bawa (2020) who observed "no negative impact of remote transitioning on learner grades" (9) but contrasts with Gonzalez et al. (2020) who found that students' performance increased during COVID-19 confinement (6). The current study also revealed that more French students' performance increased than Spanish students', which may mean that the French Undergraduate programme at the U.W.I. was better adapted to an online format than the Spanish programme. Further, most participants whose performance changed, attributed this to FOL, which is supported by Gonzalez et al. (2020) who posit that "the new learning methodology is the main reason for the change in students' performance during the confinement" (23). Therefore, ERT affected student performance to a certain extent as some students' performance increased while other students' performance did not.

Relationship between Motivation and Performance

Student motivation and academic performance may be linked. Overall, the present study found that while students were generally less motivated in virtual class, their performance remained the same. Notably, all students who were more motivated in online class saw their performance increase and credited this to OL. Both findings correlate with Bawa (2020) who found that "students performed equally or significantly higher when situated in the ERT environment" (5). Hence, motivation affects academic performance to an extent.

There is conflicting evidence regarding the effect of motivation on performance. The current study shows that some students' performance increased despite experiencing no change

in motivation or being less motivated in certain aspects. This was unexpected as studies posit that “motivation is likely to have a significant relationship with academic performance” (Tus 31, Kori et al. 335). Perhaps this was due to the online format and not necessarily motivation as a variable. There may therefore be other factors affecting student performance such as access to course materials during examinations and a more relaxed/comfortable physical environment. These findings somewhat agree with Tus (2020) who found that “students’ [...] motivation did not create any impact on their academic performance” (35). The present study also noted that some students whose performance decreased also experienced reduced motivation, which was expected as students need to be motivated to pursue their goals and to grow as individuals (Tus 36). Hence, the current study somewhat supports Orhan Özen’s (2017) conclusion that “motivation has a low level positive effect on student achievement” (44). However, the data collected regarding the extent to which these variables affect each other is inconsistent and reveals no definitive conclusion.

Preference

One student indicated being more motivated in face-to-face class due to better understanding, and more than half preferred in-person lectures because of encouragement from group collaboration, which is generally more difficult in a virtual setting. This is consistent with Wright (2017) who reports that most students felt more motivated in in-class lessons due to these reasons and “input from the lecturer” (70). The present study also revealed that some students preferred OL because learning at home is less nerve wracking than on campus since there is reduced pressure from not being in a physical room with the lecturer. This may be due to their personality as introverted students tend to prefer virtual learning (Borg et al. 6). Banyas (2019)

affirms that, “the person and environment should be considered when evaluating students’ motivation” (140). Thus, student personality affects preference of learning modality.

The current study found that most foreign language students surveyed, prefer hybrid learning for the future, consistent with previous research (Rajab et al. 8, Maican and Cocoradă 14, Paudel 80). Almost all respondents who were more motivated in in-person class, cited the lecturer’s physical presence as a reason for this. Even those who were more motivated in virtual class preferred blended learning for the future, therefore indicating that students recognize the necessity of face-to-face interaction in FLL. This corresponds to Schneider and Council’s (2020) assertion that online education can never fully replace “live education”. Therefore, hybrid learning seems to be the most demanded and suitable modality for the post-COVID transition period.

Limitations

The small sample, particularly the ratio of French to Spanish students, may have impacted the results, along with the proportion of 3rd year students (32/45) to 2nd year students (13/45). Additionally, the instrument (questionnaires) was a limitation as participants were restrained to specific responses. Moreover, this investigation was confined to 45 Spanish and French students at one university in Trinidad and Tobago, and these results therefore cannot be applied to all foreign language students in the Caribbean or worldwide.

Recommendations

ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered a learning experience. Based on this study's findings, instructors and students should work together to encourage motivation in the online classroom. Teachers should be trained in ICT use and should implement fun, engaging activities in class to stimulate motivation (Bailey and Lee 181). Institutional policies should be adjusted to facilitate proper virtual teaching and learning in future (Hodges et al. 12, Paudel 80). Course coordinators and designers should also better adapt courses to an online format, which perhaps involves modifying course content and learning objectives to accommodate students. Moreover, student support services must be improved to help them transition to FOL, and to blended learning in the post-COVID period. This includes providing students with devices and/or data plans so that they can attend virtual lectures. Teacher support systems should also be established to help them cope with OL. Blended learning should be effectuated as it would make the transition from ERT back to in-person teaching easier, as would teachers' competence in ICT use. Overall, the following approach should be adopted: "when things go back to normal, people will not remember the educational content delivered, but [...] how they felt, how we cared for them, and how we supported them" (Bozkurt and Sharma 3).

CONCLUSION

This study provided insight into how rapidly transitioning to FOL or ERT affected the motivation and performance of 2nd and 3rd year Undergraduate students of Spanish and French. Overall, this shift had a minimal impact on both variables. Most students' motivation remained the same. There was also little to no change observed in most students' performance. Notably, more female students' performance improved, though this may be due to the large female to male participant ratio. Furthermore, this study supports the theory that there may be a link between motivation and academic performance, and that these factors influence each other. The investigation also highlighted significant challenges and benefits experienced by students during this move to virtual learning. Although small, the sample population reflects the problems faced by Undergraduate students in Trinidad and Tobago. Further investigation is required in the rest of the Caribbean region to achieve a global view of how COVID-19 has changed education forever.

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APPENDIX

Online questionnaire distributed to participants via Google Forms.

Impact of Online Learning on French and Spanish UG Students at UWI, St. Augustine

Hello. My name is Abrianna Matthew and I am a 3rd year Undergraduate student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. For my thesis, I have chosen to examine the impact of shifting from in-person language learning to online language learning on the motivation and performance of 2nd and 3rd year Spanish and French Undergraduate students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

All data collected is strictly confidential and will not be used for any purpose other than research analysis.

General Questions

Demographic data.

Age:

Gender:

- Male
- Female

Major and Minor(s):

Level/Year:

- Level 2/Year 2
- Level 3/Year 3

Motivation

Assessing students' motivation during the move from in-person to online class.

1. How is your current online learning experience?

- Positive
- Negative
- Somewhere in between

2. Are you generally more motivated in a face-to-face class or in an online class?
- Face-to-face
 - Online

If FACE-TO-FACE, why? Select all that apply.

- Classroom environment conducive to work
- Encouragement from group collaboration
- Physical presence of lecturer promotes focus
- Overstimulation from **online** environment
- Ease of submission of class assignments
- Other

If ONLINE, why? Select all that apply.

- Feeling of confidence behind a screen
- Isolation of online class promotes focus and independence
- Overstimulation from **classroom** environment
- Accessibility
- Ease of submission of class assignments
- Other

3. Are you more or less motivated to LISTEN in online class?
- More
 - Less
 - Same/No change

4. Are you more or less FOCUSED in online class?
- More
 - Less
 - Same/No change

5. Are you more or less motivated to PARTICIPATE in online class?
- More
 - Less
 - Same/No change

6. Are you more or less motivated to COMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS now that class is online?

- More
- Less
- Same/No change

7. CHALLENGES encountered in transitioning from in-person to online:

- Technical issues
- Home environment/Lack of support or understanding
- Time management
- Lack of social stimulation
- Mental and/or physical strain
- None - I encountered no challenges
- Other

8. BENEFITS experienced during the transition from in-person to online:

- Mental and/or physical benefits
- Family bonding
- Financial benefits
- Becoming more tech savvy
- Time management
- None - I experienced no benefits
- Other

Performance

Assessing students' performance during the move from in-person to online class.

9. Since the COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020), my percentage in Spanish Language

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same

Why?

_____.

10. Since the COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020), my percentage in French Language
- Increased
 - Decreased
 - Stayed the same

Why?

_____.

11. If your performance has changed, is this due to online learning?
- Yes
 - No
12. For the future, I would prefer
- Face-to-face
 - Hybrid (mix of face-to-face + online)
 - Online