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Research Paper

Relationship between Iraqi EFL Students' Perceptions of Community of Inquiry and their Attention and Engagement in Online Classes

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Abstract

Community of Inquiry is a term that identifies the elements that are essential for the delivery of effective instruction (i.e., teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence). While it has been the subject of many studies in face-to-face settings, less attention has been accorded to it in online classes. This study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between Iraqi English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' community of inquiry and their attention to and engagement in online classes. To this end, 311 undergraduate students were selected from Basrah province in southern Iraq. The Google Form link for the community of inquiry scale as well as the online student engagement scale and sustained attention scale were shared among the participants via telegram and WhatsApp groups. The results of the Pearson correlation revealed that there was a significant relationship among the variables. A linear multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify

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the best predictor of the components of the community of inquiry for students' online engagement in and their attention to online classes. The results showed that social presence contributed more to the changes in learners' engagement in and attention to online classes. The findings of the study can encourage Iraqi EFL teachers to focus on specific aspects of community of inquiry to promote students' engagement and attendance in online classes.

Keywords: Attention, Engagement, Community of Inquiry, Social Presence, Teaching Presence, Cognitive Presence, Online Learning

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1. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic changed different aspects of society, including education. To control the spread of the coronavirus and to protect the health of the students and academic staff, the governments were forced to close their educational institutions and offer online classes and e-learning (El Refae et al., 2021; Nejati, 2022). This decision, according to UNESCO (2020), influenced the lives and learning performance of at least 72.4% of students from 177 countries. This condition led to the rise of two concerns, namely disparities in access to and skills to work with the new technologies and the provision of effective online instruction (Morgan, 2020; Schwartzman, 2020). To address the first concern and to offer inclusive and equitable education to all the students during the pandemic, schools and academic centers tried to offer technical assistance to increase their students' and academic members' skills to work with the technologies and to solve their technical problems. Numerous measures were also taken by institutions and charity organizations to help vulnerable and disadvantaged students by, for example, offering them free internet packages, smartphones, laptops, and tablets.

However, for online education to be successful and effective, instruction should be deliberately developed for the technological tools and online and e-learning pedagogical contexts (Schwartzman, 2020). Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) assert that for online learning to be effective, online instruction should be designed and planned to make distance learning contexts a place for effective learning. Prior research in the field of language teaching and learning has also shown that, if appropriately designed and offered, language learning through the use of technology can facilitate the language learning process by improving learners' linguistic skills and developing their abilities in areas such as punctuation, grammar, and spelling, as well as writing, listening, speaking and reading skills. It can also help digitize language learning content so that it is available on demand (Hazaymeh, 2021). Despite the steps taken by the institutions to provide support to their students and staff, the benefits assumed for online learning, and the use of relevant technologies, many scholars fear that online learning might be poorly implemented and might lack important pedagogical elements such as teaching, social, and cognitive presences; attention; and engagement, which are available in face-to-face classes and can greatly influence students' achievement (Brammer & Punyanunt-Carter, 2022; Law et al., 2019; Morgan, 2020).

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) presented a conceptual framework entitled Community of Inquiry (CoI), identifying the elements that are essential for the delivery of effective instruction. According to Garrison et al. (2010), any education is embedded within a community that is composed of teachers and students as the main participants, and learning is the result of the interaction between the participants and these core elements, namely cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Social presence (SP) is defined as students' trust in their ability to form and establish

relationships with their classmates and the class. To maintain SP, academic contexts should provide useful personal connections and group cohesion among the students and should let students express themselves socially and emotionally. Cognitive presence (CP), on the other hand, refers to students' ability to construct meaning in a community of inquiry through discussion and reflection. Finally, Law et al. (2019, p. 7) define teaching presence (TP) as "the design, facilitation, and direction of a class to ensure that students achieve meaningful and worthwhile learning outcomes while working within a community of inquiry" (Law et al., 2019, p. 7). Collectively, the results of the previous research show that SP, CP, and TP influence students' learning, engagement, motivation, and satisfaction (Law et al., 2019; Shea et al., 2003).

Although online learning environments possess many of the pedagogical features existing in traditional ones, teachers and course designers need to be aware that there are challenges inherent in these environments (Costley et al., 2017). Unlike traditional face-to-face classrooms, the effect of online learning is reduced because of technical issues such as poor internet connection, delayed message viewing, blurred sound, and signal loss. In addition, students may experience both physical and psychological, and emotional isolation from their peers and teachers, which demands higher levels of motivation and self-discipline on the part of the students to compensate for the lack of these features (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2020). In Iraq, the context of the present study, an important challenge to teaching and learning in online classes is keeping university students engaged with the course and materials. Moreover, some students who enroll in online courses do not complete them or remain engaged throughout the course. Another challenge to teaching and learning in online classes is the provision of the core elements proposed by CoI. As Shea et al. (2003) argue, the analysis of

online classes in terms of the existence of these elements can help understand how they can be implemented more effectively. Dick et al. (2015) also state that obtaining optimal learning outcomes results from the interaction between several factors such as instructional activities, the delivery system, the teacher, students, and the learning atmosphere.

However, previous research (e.g., Castellanos-Reyes, 2020; Galikyan & Admiraal, 2019; Kucuk & Richardson, 2019; Law et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021) has mostly dealt with these variables in contexts other than EFL contexts and has not paid enough attention to the relationship between these variables and students' attention in online classes. Due to the nature of online classes, attention plays a pivotal role. This is why Brammer and Punyanunt-Carter (2022) state that one of the unique responsibilities of scholars is to examine the variables that can influence students' attention and engagement in online classes. Additionally, the analysis of these variables in Iraqi contexts has not received the attention it deserves, especially in online contexts where there is scrutiny of research (Qays et al., 2022). The purpose of the present study is, therefore, to add to the existing literature by studying the relationship between CoI core elements and students' engagement and attention in online classes in an Iraqi EFL context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Community of Inquiry (CoI)

The CoI framework was first proposed as a collaborative-constructivist model to help researchers understand the dynamics of online learning contexts and to examine the quality of online education (Garrison et al., 2011). To do so, Garrison et al. (2011) suggest three interrelated elements, i.e., social, cognitive, and teaching presences, the interactivity of which determines the quality and efficiency of online learning.

The term "social presence" refers primarily to the interaction between students in a course both socially and emotionally (Garrison et al., 2011; Fuchs, 2022). To foster a sense of community among learners and to encourage cognitive presence, students must feel comfortable expressing themselves deeply and meaningfully in a classroom setting. Indeed, argument and critical thinking in a course are more indicative of a close social group than an excessively polite, dry discussion of an impersonal group (Fuchs, 2022). Numerous studies have revealed that the use of humor, social introductions, and emotional expressions fosters rapport and personal connection across a range of learning contexts (Bates, 2020; Bergen & LaBonte, et al., 2020; Fuchs, 2022). Hodges et al. (2020), for instance, analyzed transcripts from two 13-week online graduate courses. The results of their study showed that the use of emoticons, humor, and self-disclosure all indicate affective responses. When nonverbal and social cues are removed from communication, the ability to express emotions is diminished. However, the shortcomings of written communication can be compensated for through the use of other modes of emotional expression such as banter, teasing, and joking that can be effective in "transmitting goodwill and reducing social distance" (Fuchs, 2022, p. 52).

Additionally, research supports self-disclosure as a means of reducing social isolation associated with a lack of human connection when utilizing CMC (Johnson et al., 2020). Furthermore, studies on addressing one another by name discovered associations with positive student outcomes (Bergen & LaBonte, et al., 2020). Furthermore, research indicates a strong relationship between students' satisfaction and social presence. Castellanos-Reyes (2020), for instance, concluded from the results of their study that social presence alone predicted about 60% of the students' satisfaction. Similarly, the results

of Ahmadaliev et al.'s (2018) study showed that social presence contributed to 40% of the variance in the participants' pride scores.

Cognitive presence, on the other hand, refers to the type of learning involving deep learning or higher-order thinking skills. Garrison (2011) refers to cognitive presence as the "intellectual atmosphere" (p3, 2011) and associates it with three interconnected cognitive and motivational constructs: reflective inquiry, self-directed learning, and metacognition. He argues that asynchronous, written communication is optimal because it enables learners to be reflective while also being interactive. Additionally, Garrison (2011) relates cognitive presence to Dewey's (1933) reflective inquiry, suggesting that if the purpose is to create cognitive presence in an online course, the course must be designed to be pondered upon rather than passively absorbed. The results of previous research (Galikyan & Admiraal, 2019; Kucuk & Richardson, 2019) have also shown that cognitive presence can have a positive impact on students' academic performance.

Finally, teaching presence includes activities such as planning for the course and activities and the provision of support and facilitation of students' learning to obtain desired learning outcomes. The results of previous research (Armellini & de Stefani, 2016; Babb et al., 2010; Zuo et al., 2021) shows that the existence of teaching presence in online learning environments can improve students' inquiry on the direction of content (cognitive presence), pleasure and perceived learning, and sense of a learning community (social presence). Literature implies that there is a relationship between instructional presence and behavioral engagement (Goggins & Xing, 2016; Ma et al., 2014). Prior research implies factors such as instructional activities and teaching materials influence student participation (Ma et al., 2014). If students have negative experiences with online instructors, they may perceive feedback or other teaching presence elements (such as wording in the

syllabus) negatively and opt not to raise questions or seek assistance from the instructor (behavioral engagement). Teaching presence, whether in the form of instructor interaction or deliberate course design, can act as a catalyst for behavioral engagement throughout the course (Bliss & Lawrence, 2009; Zhao & Sullivan, 2017). Research (Law et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021) has also shown that teaching presence can have a positive influence on other components of CoI (i.e., cognitive presence and social presence, and on students' learning performance). In fact, Wang et al. (2021) argue that teaching presence directly and positively influences students' online learning quality. Additionally, Preece and Bularafa (2015) state that the inclusion of CoI elements into language classes can create a positive atmosphere and can positively influence language learners' development of language skills. However, these variables have not received the attention they deserve in EFL contexts.

2.2 Learners' Engagement and Attention in Online Classes

While the community of inquiry examines students' perceptions of various factors affecting their learning, engagement (cognitive and behavioral) is a direct result of students' course experiences. Ben-Eliyahu et al. (2018) define engagement as "the degree to which one is productively involved in an activity" (p. 7). This involves a student's level of commitment, focus, participation, and persistence in a given activity. Similarly, Kuh (2003, p. 25 as cited in Burch et al., 2015) defines engagement as "the time and energy students dedicate to educationally sound activities within and beyond the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to drive students to take part in these activities" (Kuh, 2003, p. 25 as cited in Burch et al., 2015). However, this definition does not confine engagement to what happens inside the class and gives roles to students' participation beyond the class and the policies assumed by the institutions and instructors. Attention is

also proven to influence students' learning, especially in second language classes (Hlas, 2019). Research in the field of education has shown that paying attention is the prerequisite for learning (Brammer & Punyanunt-Carter, 2022).

The importance of engagement and attention can be traced within the Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1999, p.518), which puts emphasis on the "physical and psychological energy" that students dedicate to their academic experience. Increasing a learner's engagement and attention in the learning process helps them build the skills they need to think critically as well as obtain knowledge (Dixson, 2015). Engagement and attention can also make students feel that they have a contribution to the process, which can in turn lead to an increase in motivation and keeps learners active and involved with the content, teachers, and peers (Dixson, 2015). In short, attention and engagement are essential in keeping learners motivated and achieving their learning objectives. According to Pool et al. (2017), learning is influenced by the energy and time learners put into their educational activities, and Gudapati (2018) argues that meaningful learning is the result of fully engaged learners. Researchers have found that activities that encourage online and social presence, increase learners' confidence, and improve their performance are key factors in increasing their engagement and attention (Anderson et al., 2014; Gerber, Mans-Kemp, & Schlechter, 2013; Guo & Bai, 2019). Additionally, Geri et al. (2017) state that adding interactive elements to the lessons can increase students' attention span. Thus, it can be argued that the elements of CoI have the potential to influence students' engagement and attention. In this regard, Jackson (2020) suggests that teachers and course designers should design strategies to include the core elements of CoI in their classes to increase students' engagement and self-efficacy. However, how

teaching, cognitive, and social presences influence EFL learners' attention and engagement in online classes has not received the attention it deserves.

Scholars argue that educational technologies may cause attention deficits (Lodge & Harrison, 2019). This is why Brammer and Punyanunt-Carter (2022) state that one of the unique responsibilities of scholars is to examine the variables that can influence students' attention and engagement in online classes. As a response to this call and to fill the mentioned lacunae in the literature, the present study seeks the answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL students' perceptions of community of inquiry and their engagement with online classes?
2. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL students' perceptions of community of inquiry and their attention to online classes?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

After securing the necessary approval from both the college and the participants, undergraduate Iraqi EFL students studying English at Shatt Al Arab University College, Basrah, Iraq were recruited to participate in this study. 311 male and female students participated in this study with ages ranging from 18 to 25. They all spoke Arabic as their first language and were attending online classes in the google classroom platform for one hour for each session at the time of the study. Students who agreed to take part in the study were directed to respond to the instruments.

3.2 Instruments

The data was gathered through questionnaires and scales. The instruments that were used in this study are briefly described.

3.2.1 Community of Inquiry Scale

The 34-item CoI survey scale, previously developed and validated by Arbaugh et al. (2008), was used to examine the participants' perceptions of the existence of cognitive, teaching, and social presences in virtual EFL contexts. This instrument has shown well-established reliability and validity in both virtual and face-to-face contexts in previous studies (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Caskurlu, 2018; Turk et al., 2022). This instrument uses a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. High scores for each type of online presence show that the intended presence exists at a high level.

3.2.2 Online Student Engagement Scale (OSE)

The online Student Engagement Scale (OSE) developed and validated by Dixson (2015) was used to measure the participants' engagement in online learning courses. The scale consists of 19 items, which were examined by the participants on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1. not at all characteristic of me, 2. not really characteristic of me, 3. moderately characteristic of me, 4. characteristic of me, and 5. very characteristic of me. This instrument was developed by Dixson (2015) to investigate the extent to which students actively engage with their online classes by talking, thinking, and interacting with the materials of the course, other students, and their teacher. The test has shown well-established reliability and validity.

3.2.3 Sustained Attention Scale

The participants' attention was measured through Bolkan and Griffin's (2018) sustained attention scale. This scale contains three items that measure the extent to which the participants focus on the course content. The items used in this scale measured the students' attention by examining if they paid full attention to the class, did not shift their attention to other non-task

factors, and sustained their attention throughout the course. The participants rated these items on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = not at all true of me to 7 = very true of me. This instrument has shown well-established reliability and validity.

3.3 Procedure

After getting the approval of the college and the instructors, the researcher tried to reach out to about three hundred Iraqi EFL students, who attended online courses and agreed to take part in the study. The above-mentioned instruments were shared, and the participants were asked to carefully read the items and rate them based on the available anchor points after their online classes finished. It is to be noted that at least three experts were asked to read the instruments before they were given to the participants to see if they fit the context of the present study. They were also tested with a similar group of Iraqi EFL students to ensure item clarity and internal consistency. The participants were also asked to respond to demographic questions asking about their age, gender, and prior experience with online learning. The required data were collected during the first semester of 2022

4. Results

To check the reliability of the questionnaires used in this study, Cronbach's alpha index was used. As indicated in Table 1, all the instruments showed satisfactory indices of reliability ($\alpha \geq .7$).

Table 1
Reliability of the Instruments

Questionnaire	No of Items	Reliability Index
CoI	34	.91
OSE	19	.89
SAS	3	.76

A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was also run to check the normality of the gathered data for each variable included in this study. As

seen in Table 2, the significance levels for all of the scales are higher than 0.05, thus it can be concluded that the distribution of the data for all of the variables was normal.

Table 2
Normality of the Gathered Data

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
CoI	.168	311	.121
OSE	.157	311	.098
SAS	.123	311	.081

4.1 The Answer to the First Research Question

Research question one examined the relationship between Iraqi EFL students' perceptions of community of inquiry and their engagement with online classes. To answer this question, a Pearson correlation test was used. As can be seen in Table 3, there is a positive correlation between CoI and online engagement ($r = .936$, sig. = .000). It can, therefore, be concluded that if learners' perceptions of the existence of community of inquiry increase, their online engagement will also increase.

Table 3
Correlation between Respondents' CoI and their Engagement with Online Classes

		CoI	Online Engagement
CoI	Pearson	1	.936
	Sig.		.000
	N	311	311

A Pearson correlation and a linear multiple regression analysis were further employed to find which of the components of CoI (teaching, social, or cognitive presence) can best predict students' online engagement. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of the participants' online engagement and the components of the community of inquiry.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Respondents' CoI Components and their Engagement with Online Classes

	M	SD	N
Online Engagement	79.41	10.56	311
Teaching	55.48	5.81	311
Social	36.62	6.69	311
Cognitive	48.85	5.61	311

Table 5 shows the results of the Pearson correlation test used to measure the relationship between the components of CoI and online engagement. As can be seen in Table 5, there are significant relationships between the respondents' online engagement and their perceptions of the existence of the components of CoI. Considering the size of the relationship (r), social presence (.86) showed the strongest and teaching presence the weakest relationship.

Table 5
Correlations between Respondents' CoI Components and their Engagement with Online Classes

		Online Engagement	Teaching	Social	Cognitive
Pearson Correlation	Online Engagement	1.000	.589	.863	.738
	Teaching		1.000	.501	.546
	Social			1.000	.683
	Cognitive				1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Online Engagement	.			.000
	Teaching	.000	.		
	Social	.000	.000	.	
	Cognitive	.000	.000	.000	.

A linear multiple regression analysis was also performed to identify to what extent the components of CoI contribute to online engagement. As can be seen in Table 6, the R^2 value is .80, meaning that 80.1 percent of the changes in the participants' online engagement can be described by the changes in the predictors (i.e., cognitive, teaching, and social presence).

Table 6

Model Summary for Respondents' CoI Components and their Engagement with Online Classes

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SEE	Durbin-Watson
1	.895 ^a	.801	.799	4.739	1.679

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cognitive, Teaching, Social

b. Dependent Variable: Online Engagement

4.2 The Answer to the Second Research Question

The second research question, on the hand, dealt with the relationship between Iraqi EFL students' perceptions of the existence of community of inquiry and their attention to online classes. To answer this question, a Pearson correlation test was run. As can be seen in Table 7, there is a positive correlation between the total score of COI and attention to online classes ($r = .856$, $\text{sig.} = .000$). It can, consequently, be concluded that if learners' perceptions of the existence of community of inquiry increases, their attention to online classes will also increase.

Table 7

Correlation between Respondents' CoI and their Attention to Online Classes

		CoI	attention to online classes
CoI	Pearson	1	.856
	Sig.		.000
	N	311	311

To examine what components of CoI (i.e., teaching, social, or cognitive presence) best predict the participants' attention to online classes, a Pearson correlation and a linear multiple regression analysis were employed. Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics of the students' attention to online classes and the components of community of inquiry.

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Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Respondents' CoI components and Their Attention to Online Classes

	M	SD	N
SA	17.71	1.98	311
Teaching	55.485	5.81	311
Social	36.623	6.69	311
Cognitive	48.852	5.61	311

Table 9 shows the results of the Pearson correlation test employed to measure the relationship between the participants' perceptions of the existence of the components of CoI and their attention to online classes. As can be seen in Table 9, there are significant relationships between the respondents' attention to online classes and the components of CoI. Considering the size of the relationship (r), social presence (.70) showed the strongest relationship.

Table 9

Correlations between Respondents' CoI Components and their Attention to Online Classes

		SA	Teaching	Social	Cognitive
Pearson Correlation	SA	1.000	.525	.701	.644
	Teaching		1.000	.501	.546
	Social			1.000	.683
	Cognitive				1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	SA	.			
	Teaching	.000	.	.000	.000
	Social	.000	.000	.	.000
	Cognitive	.000	.000	.000	.

Table 10 presents the results of the linear multiple regression analysis performed to identify to what extent components of CoI predict the students' attention to online classes. As shown in Table 10, the R^2 value is .56, meaning that 56.1 percent of the changes in the students' attention to online classes can be described by the changes in the predictors (cognitive, teaching, and social presence).

Table 10
Model Summary for Respondents' CoI Components and their Attention to Online Classes

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.749 ^a	.561	.557		1.323	1.945

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cognitive, Teaching, Social

b. Dependent Variable: SA

5. Discussion

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between Iraqi EFL students' perceptions of community of inquiry and their engagement with and their attention to online classes. The results of data analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between the students' online engagement and their perceptions of the community of inquiry. Social presence was found as one of the components of the community of inquiry that had the strongest relationship with the participants' engagement. The results from this study are corroborated by the investigation carried out by Jackson (2020), showing that the elements associated with cognitive presence play an important role in a student's self-efficacy and cognitive engagement in a course.

This result is also supported by the study conducted by Garrison et al. (2000), who showed that students' perceptions of the existence of community of inquiry encourage students to engage in discussions of the course, enabling them to integrate the new knowledge with prior knowledge. Also, Kovanovi et al. (2015) drew on the CoI model to examine its contribution to the cognitive presence aspect regarding online engagement in a group of postgraduates. The results showed the contribution of CoI components to the participants' engagement. Similarly, the study conducted by Preece and Bularafa (2015) revealed that community of inquiry in the context of L2 learning and teaching can create a comforting situation for learners, enabling

them to engage with one another as well as with the teachers. Indeed, this study lends support to the previous research on CoI by shedding light on the relationship between the components of CoI and students' engagement.

Moreover, the results of this study revealed a significant relationship between the students' attention to online classes and their perceptions of the community of inquiry. As with the first research question, social presence was also found as one of the components of the community of inquiry that had the strongest relationship with attention to online classes. This result is consistent with that of Geri et al. (2017) study, indicating that interactivity and CoI can increase students' attention spans. This result can be explained in terms of the students' focus on the meanings while interacting with each other. In such a context, students need to pay attention to what is being said and written to understand each other, which can in turn increase their attention.

Therefore, given the remarkable contribution of social presence as one of the core components of CoI to L2 learning and its facilitating role in cognitive development and critical thinking, this component should be prioritized by L2 teachers. This conclusion has also been corroborated by some previous studies conducted on how social presence contributes to educational effectiveness. These studies have pointed out a positive correlation between social presence and enhanced learning (e.g., Kucuk & Richardson, 2019; Williams et al., 2006).

Accounting for how social presence contributes to enhancing learning, these researchers maintain that the existence of social presence can cause learners to actively participate in classroom activities. Indeed, if learners perceive that their presence is acknowledged and valued by the social environment, their motivation to earn better scores is increased, which results in their perceived satisfaction with the learning process. In the same vein,

placing particular emphasis on social presence, Lin et al. (2015) elaborate on why social presence is of enormous importance in L2 learning settings. They maintain that social presence involves learners in open communication, which can decrease their level of anxiety. They assert that the effective management of community-based communication in L2 classes makes the learning process enjoyable and effective for L2 learners. This can finally result in increased satisfaction among the learners. In line with this study, Asoodar et al. (2014) applied the CoI framework to see how the community is constructed. The statistical results revealed that the learners characterized by a higher sense of community outperformed the other learners in terms of their academic performance and grades, resulting in the existence of a higher level of cognitive presence as another component of CoI.

Regarding the interactions in the cognitive presence component, this study is in line with the one conducted by Yudhiantara (2022), which showed how CoI accounts for learning from a pragmatic perspective. In operational terms, as far as cognitive presence is concerned, this framework requires learners to be equipped with the capability to identify problems, find information to respond to the problems, work out the essence of the problem by combining the available information to answer problems, and then offer solutions. Generally, the CoI framework emphasizes knowledge building that is characterized by epistemic engagement. In such a context, the teaching presence component serves as an important contributor to the efficacy of teaching. Indeed, CoI enhances collaboration skills while building a positive learning environment.

The study also showed a rather weak relationship between the students' attention and engagement and teaching presence. This finding is in line with an investigation conducted by Kim (2015), who showed that teaching presence, as a component of CoI, can have a positive direct effect on

motivation. Providing evidence regarding the importance of teaching presence as an important component of CoI, the study carried out by Feng et al. (2017) revealed that teachers can enhance their teaching presence by designing and implementing different modes of scaffolds. This indicates the necessity of understanding the contribution of different factors that can enhance teaching presence as well as how this multi-faceted component of CoI can be improved. Along the same line, the study conducted by Kozan and Richardson (2014) showed that teaching presence has a mediating and regulating role in the effects of CoI; therefore, it is of great importance. Indeed, they believe that teaching presence is as important as social presence, which in turn enhances cognitive presence. The present study also provides evidence for the theoretical predictions of the CoI framework.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The results of this research reveal that the components of CoI can contribute to two learner variables (i.e., EFL students' engagement with and attention to online classes). In this context, the CoI framework can provide guidelines for both students and teachers concerning effective behaviors and interactions. As the review of the literature showed, students and teachers can reinforce their interactions by including the CoI components in the context of the classroom, which leads to an increase in the quality of the learning process.

As pointed out by Garrison et al. (2010), the learning process enables students to construct knowledge effectively. Indeed, the three components of CoI, i.e., teaching, social, and cognitive presences, drive the learning process to reach a successful level. Along the same line, the CoI framework seeks to provide the learners and the instructors with ample opportunities to construct knowledge. This is, in particular, important in an online environment, where scholars believe that may lead to attention and learning deficit (Brammer &

Punyanunt-Carter, 2022). Based on the results of the present study, it can be concluded that teaching presence should be taken seriously by teachers. In particular, as far as the foreign language context is concerned, the presence of supportive teachers is key to the students' success. As already mentioned, teaching skills involve the organization, design, and facilitation of learning as well as the provision of teaching. Based on the results of this study, there needs to be an increased emphasis on changing the traditional nature of instructional programs to make them more consistent with CoI. As far as the social component is concerned, it is worth noting that this component can be of special significance in online educational programs. This is because the existence of social presence can lead to positive feelings, interactive exchanges, and cohesion, fostering a collaborative and collegial environment.

Overall, the CoI framework articulates a type of knowledge building that has characteristics of epistemic engagement where the teaching presence component facilitate teaching and cognition and the social presence component provides assistance for productive participation. The main focus of the CoI framework is to generate an effective community that fosters and supports learning. Indeed, CoI enhances collaboration skills and builds a positive learning environment. Obviously, L2 learners find a collaborative environment more appealing than other learning settings. This is because they feel less anxious when it comes to sharing their ideas.

Lending support to the same assertion, research already done on the role of CoI (e.g., Garrison et al., 2010; Law et al., 2019; Swan & Ice, 2010; Wang et al., 2021) has shown that the CoI can be used as an effective theoretical framework, which can provide researchers with a more detailed picture of online learning processes. Similarly, Castellanos-Reyes (2020) asserts that the CoI framework can serve as a solid guideline for researchers to analyze online courses.

Although this study indicated an insignificant relationship between cognitive presence as a component of CoI and the participants' intent to persist, it should be noted that this component should not be underestimated by educational institutes or second language teachers. This component is critical because it is concerned with higher-order processes such as critical thinking and meaningful learning; additionally, it can keep the learner cognitively and metacognitively prepared for learning. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to make L2 teachers aware of how students' social, teaching, and cognitive presences can contribute to increased learning and how these components can be created.

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, we studied the mentioned variables on university students. There is a need to examine these variables on other informants such as EFL and teenage learners to get more generalizable outcomes. The inclusion of multiple respondents can also provide the chance for researchers to examine the value that they place on each of the core elements of CoI, which can help teachers better design their courses and communicate with their students (see Thompson et al., 2022). Secondly, we targeted our measurement on the participants' responses to questionnaires. Future researchers can include other methods such as interviews and observations to examine the relationship between the variables more comprehensively. Thirdly, as discussed, CoI elements have the potential to influence other variables such as students' satisfaction, persistence, collaboration, and satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Future research is needed to examine these variables to expand the literature. Finally, most of the studies on CoI elements have dealt with how they can promote other student- and teacher-related variables. Future research should provide insights into possible ways to include CoI elements in EFL classes.

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