



## **Attitudes, Motivation, and Beliefs of Online Foreign Language Learners Amidst the Pandemic**

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Covid-19 pandemic was an event which undeniably changed the paradigm of language learning. Online language learning has emerged as a significant catalyst, shedding light on distinctive attitudes, motivations, and beliefs among learners. The aim of the present study was to explore how learners articulated their attitudes, motivations, and beliefs in this context. To achieve these objectives, two hundred thirteen respondents participated in the study, completing modified versions of the AMTB (Attitude/Motivation Test Battery) and BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory) questionnaires. In addition, eight online language learners were engaged in one-on-one interviews. Quantitative data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, while qualitative data were transcribed and examined using thematic analysis techniques as proposed by Auerbach & Silverstein (2003). Drawing upon the Complex Dynamic Theory by Larsen-Freeman (2017), the study's findings revealed that foreign language learning during the Covid-19 pandemic constitutes a complex dynamic construct that is profoundly influenced by learners' attitudes, motivations, and beliefs. These findings align with prior research, suggesting that learners generally have positive attitudes toward language learning and the target language community, and they exhibit a high level of motivation in their pursuit of online language acquisition.

Keywords: language learning motivation, attitudes about language learning, beliefs about language learning, covid-19 pandemic, online language learning

### **INTRODUCTION**

The global crisis has changed the way language learning takes place. Even though online language education was available before the pandemic, it has now solidified its position in the future of foreign language education. Online language learning has become increasingly significant in the Philippines, which experienced one of the lockdowns and restrictions on face-to-face (F2F) classes.

This study aimed to shed light on the experiences of foreign language learners in the mode of online language learning during the pandemic. Given the challenges faced in

**Citation:** Arciaga, K., & Lucas, R. I. (2024). Attitudes, motivation, and beliefs of online foreign language learners amidst the pandemic. *International Journal of Instruction*, 17(3), 665-678. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2024.17337a>

the Philippines, addressing this gap is crucial. To delve into the gap, it is integral to uncover foreign language learners' attitudes, motivations, and beliefs regarding language learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, which can serve as a framework, for post-pandemic language learning.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### *Attitudes*

Attitudes and motivation play a pivotal role in language learning, particularly Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Numerous studies have shown the interconnected nature of attitudes and motivation in the context of language learning. Given this inextricable relationship, this section integrates an examination of these two critical factors.

Learners' attitudes toward language learning indeed exert a significant influence on their overall language learning experiences. The importance of language attitudes cannot be emphasized enough, as they function as a determinant of learners' success in language learning endeavors. Language attitudes therefore have been extensively studied, including attitudes toward the target language itself, its culture, community (Bilaniuk, 2003; González-Riaño et al., 2017), and even attitudes toward tourism and the community of people who use the target language (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005). These studies depict that learners' attitudes toward the language and culture can be shaped by various constructs, which encourage a deeper exploration at a macro and micro level.

Language attitudes shed light not only on overall attitudes toward the target language but also on learners' broader perceptions of the target language's community and culture (Bilaniuk, 2003; Wright, 1999). For instance, certain studies have examined the language attitudes of immigrants toward their L1 within communities that were characterized by linguistic diversity (e.g., González-Riaño et al., 2017). This phenomenon truly reflects how the perceived status of the language influences language attitudes.

Sicam and Lucas (2016) investigated the attitudes of Filipinos toward English, their second language (L2), and Filipino, their first language (L1). The study involved 473 bilingual students from secondary educational institutions who completed a questionnaire probing their attitudes towards these languages. The findings revealed that both the English and Filipino languages were viewed positively, with students attributing favorable attitudes toward these two languages primarily for instrumental reasons.

Another perspective on studying language attitudes involved analyzing the influence of tourism. Dörnyei and Csizér (2005) examined language attitudes among grade school students in Hungary and discovered a direct correlation between the extent of their contact with the culture of the target language and their perceived self-confidence in learning an additional language.

#### *Attitudes and Motivation*

Numerous investigations have explored attitudes and motivation as intertwined themes when scrutinizing language learning. Attitudes and motivation tend to exhibit a general

correlation; however, the type of motivation, whether integrative or instrumental, varies and is dependent on the context (Rasool & Winke, 2019; Sicam & Lucas, 2016; Svanes, 1987).

Regarding multicultural learners, Bernaus et al. (2004) probed the link between motivation and attitudes towards Spanish, Catalan, and English. Their findings uncovered that learners with an Asian ethnic background exhibited more positive attitudes towards acquiring English compared to their Spanish ethnic counterparts. Moreover, learners reported higher level of motivation to learn Spanish and more favorable attitudes towards learning English than towards learning Catalan, the language of instruction in their learning institution.

Hamilton and Serrano (2015) studied students from mixed cultures, in the process of learning Catalan. However, the major result was that, for advanced learners, the target language for academic studies and professional pursuits provided the main motivation for success. The research underlined the saliency of active engagement via vocabulary building in second language mastery by high proficient learners.

Previous studies back a connection between language attitudes and motivation; large-scale surveys such as the ones conducted by W. Csizér and V. Dörnyei (2005) and those done by V. Dörnyei and W. Csizér (2005) support this notion. Two studies compared attitudes, motivations, practice of intercultural contact, and internal factors behind coming and going abroad to tourism (Hungary) by surveying 4,765 pupils from the same data pool in Hungary. Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) targeted the motivation of language selection and the elements including its usage and exertion, therefore the model was set up with integrativeness playing the major role, which furthermore depends on the attitude toward speakers of that language, cultural interest, and self-competence level. While Dörnyei and Csizér (2005), who published their work later on, addressed the influence of intercultural contact and tourism on attitudes and motivation, they were more interested in understanding how these factors could help facilitate motivation in their L1. Their statistics showed that students manifested a more positive attitude toward the language of the target community and culture, with the amount of exposure they got.

The other large-scale study was carried out by Kormos and Csizér (2008), using a survey of 623 pupils in Hungary who considered the English language useful. The research displayed the students' having a positive attitude about English as the world's language. It was shown also that the students were not only aware of the global impact of the English language but also that they had an enormous motivation and interest in learning it. These findings demonstrated that for many of these students, English as a global language became a symbol of their prospects for a brighter future and a source of motivation to invest more efforts in improving their language skills.

Hamilton and Serrano (2015) carried out a study in a class of advanced learners majoring in European languages, and they found that their students had strong tendencies toward integrative motivation. The study also showed that integrative motivation is often one of the factors behind the successful learning of the target language and the learning of the host culture.

In addition, Lan and Lucas (2015), looked at the attitudes and language learning strategies of Vietnamese college students. Through questionnaires as well as interviews, it was discovered that Vietnamese college students normally had a positive attitude about learning English as a foreign language, and both instrumental and integrative motives for the language were evident in their study.

In addition to attitudes and motivation, various other factors may influence them. Getie (2020) explored English language learning attitudes in Ethiopia, revealing that learners displayed both instrumental and integrative motivation. However, almost half of these Ethiopian learners reported negative attitudes towards English language learning due to their teachers, while they maintained positive attitudes towards the English language and its culture.

Just like Getie (2020) emphasizing the significance of external factors, in the context of online language learning, Meşe and Sevilen (2021) explored EFL learners' motivation by using qualitative data from 12 Turkish learners of English. Through interviews and writing assignments, they found that internally motivated learners believed that external factors, such as satisfaction with course design and materials, did not align with their internal motivation. Despite the challenges of adapting to new studying habits for online language classes, the learners expressed that the experience was rewarding and enjoyable.

#### *Beliefs about Language Learning*

Hitherto, previous studies have emphasized strong relationships between attitudes and motivation and suggested that the cognitive component of language learning constitutes learners' beliefs. Substantial work has been done on the impact of language learning attitudes, motivation and beliefs on language learning. It has been recognized that they have the potential to either foster or hinder learning. Beliefs about language learning have tremendous pressure on the language learning attitude and the process. In most cases, it is believed that both the positive and the negative attitudes and beliefs of a person can have a powerful impact on the learner's satisfaction about their progress which is measured by the perceived proficiency in the language, and vice versa. Studies show that advanced proficient learners do not possess negative belief about language learning (Tang & Tian, 2015). However, low proficient learners believe to have more negative beliefs (Abdolazadeh & Nia, 2014).

Tang and Tian (2015) took 546 postgraduate EFL learners at the tertiary level in China as their research participants. The study results were based on two evaluative tools which addressed the association of the students' beliefs. They were – the Inventory of Belief about Language Learning (BALLI) by Horwitz (1987) and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990). It was found that Chinese postgrads regarded the ability to speak English as an opportunity to secure jobs that pay above-average wages in the future.

Yin (2008)'s dissertation had 1201 college students in Chinese EFL. Through the BALLI questionnaire, factor analysis was employed to derive belief factors. First factor was whether the learners have the right values about language and if they incorporate

the strategies into their repertoire. Second factor was that they value grammar and translation.

#### *Research Questions*

To investigate the use of attitudes, motivation, and beliefs as well as to delve into learners' experiences of online Japanese schools during Covid-19 pandemic, the following research questions were constructed:

1. What are the attitudes, motivation, and beliefs of online foreign language learners?
2. How do these learners express their attitudes, motivation, and beliefs during their online foreign language learning in the pandemic?

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The language learning attitude of learners continues to be, so to speak, reshaped by the pandemic that influenced the way they approach and methodologies they use in attaining their mastery of foreign languages. The theory of Complex Dynamics was applied to argue that the pandemic is an external and instructive factor that prolongs language learning time for online foreign language learners. The students made a reactive adjustment to this changed environment and displayed their distinctive motivation, beliefs, and attitudes about foreign language learning processes.

The introduction of Complexity Dynamics Theory in the domain of scientific research by Larsen-Freeman (1997) brought forth the concepts of chaos and complexity in the context of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). She developed her type as "complex and non-linear systems" that consist of interaction among intelligence, economy, and nature (p.142). It was claimed by Larsen-Freeman that the process of language learning is unarguably so complex and variable that it is situated in the way learners discover their needs through multiple interactions with teachers, peers, and different sources.

This process can then be seen as an 'adaption' within the framework of the Complex Dynamic theory of language learning. Other scholars have also introduced similar notions, such as 'dynamic systems theory' (Bot et al., 2013 as cited in Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2019). However, in the context of language learning, Larsen-Freeman's (2017) description of the complex dynamic theory aligned with the focus of the present study, particularly due to its inclusion of "expectations for non-predictable events" (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2019, p.386). Given that the global pandemic constituted an unpredictable event, its impact on our foreign language learners remains beyond previous knowledge. In this regard, the theory of Complex Dynamic Systems (CDS) proves valuable in elucidating how the pandemic has influenced learners' perspectives on their experiences in online classes, as well as their motivation, attitudes, and beliefs about language learning.

#### **METHOD**

The current study employed a mixed method approach which integrated both quantitative and qualitative data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) advocated for this

integrative method to be "stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself" (p.294).

The present study adopted a mixed methods sequential explanatory design. This approach largely combines both quantitative and qualitative data and presents the integrated findings and the deduction (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically speaking, this study took quan → QUAL format where the quantitative outcomes are intended to "explain the quantitative results" with a specific concentration on the qualitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p.118).

The study proposal was applied into the Ethics Board of the University in the Philippines, by the researchers before data collection and was permitted in July 2022.

### Participants in the Present Study

After a month of online survey distribution from September 2022 to October 2022, the total of 213 questionnaire results were used for the final analysis of the present study. The following table describes the demographic information of the respondents in the present study.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants in the Present Study

Gender	Female: 117 (55%) Male : 96 (45%)
Age	Average age: 29.36 (from 18 years old to 60 years old)
Duration of studying Japanese	Average: 12.90 months

The qualitative part of the study involved eight learners who were invited for one-on-one interviews referred by their teachers who helped the researcher distribute the questionnaire. Table 2 describes the demographic information of the participants in the present study.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Eight Students in the Present Study

Pseudonym (Gender)	Age	Duration of studying Japanese
James (Male)	20s	3 months
Amber (Female)	20s	6 years
Nicole (Female)	20s	3 years
Anna (Female)	30s	1 year
Daisy (Female)	20s	6 months
Aaron (Male)	20s	1 year
Mike (Male)	20s	6 months
Kamille (Female)	30s	2 years

### Instrument

The instrument in the present study was created via Google Form. The first part of the questionnaire is called Individual Background Questionnaire (IBQ) which sought basic demographic information of the participants. IBQ was based on open-ended questions while the rest of the questionnaires were constructed in a 5-point Likert scale. The

second part of the questionnaire was modified from Attitudes and Motivation Questionnaire (AMTB) by Gardner (1985;2004). The third part of the questionnaire was Beliefs about Language Learning (BALLI) by Horwitz (1988;1999). The questionnaire was modified as all of the statements were changed into “Japanese”, and the nationalities were changed to “Filipinos” in the context of the present study. A pilot study was conducted to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, as well as the comprehensibility of interview protocols and questions. The reliability of the modified questionnaires was also analyzed through Cronbach’s alpha. Twenty seven respondents who were not included in the actual data analysis were selected to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability of the three modified questionnaires was internal consistent according to Cronbach’s alpha, was therefore used in the present study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Quantitative results and qualitative results based on the interview are tabulated as follows:

Table 3  
Quantitative and qualitative results

	Learners’ self-reported results	Themes emerged from interviews
Attitude	Attitudes towards learning Japanese (M =4.10)	Positive attitudes about learning foreign language (5/8)
Motivation	Integrative motivation (M = 4.076)	Integrative motivation (8/8)
	Instrumental motivation (M = 3.99)	Instrumental motivation (6/8)
Beliefs	Learning strategies (M = 4.50)	Mastering the vocabulary and grammar (4/8)

### Attitudes

The results showed that Filipino learners of Japanese language had positive attitudes, and they were likely to be influenced by the bilingual environment they lived in because of co-existence of both the Filipino and English languages (Sicam & Lucas, 2016). Since the psychological condition of learners based in the Philippines, which has a multilingual culture; therefore, there is a chance that people living in the Philippines generally hold positive attitudes toward foreign languages learning. This might be embedded mental capacity of the Filipinos as they have experienced language change through their years of education. Identically, participants in this study also had positive attitudes towards learning their foreign language, aligning with González-Riaño et al (2017) in a bilingual setting. The country of the Philippines adopts a multilingual system, which likely causes favorable attitudes towards different languages.

Taking interviews from 8 participants revealed that altogether 5 mentioned positive perspective about online Japanese learning. One of the participants, Aaron, impelled by ambition to work in Japan, displayed the same confidence when he realized he could handle the language through online classes.

Besides the attitudes of the learners, some specific elements can contribute to the situation as well. The most interesting example is Nicole, who loved learning kanji, treating it like a story full of mystery. Language was (one of) the challenges that excited her in terms of learning processes both on the micro and macro level. This same

message was repeated by Amber who found the process of learning a new language enjoyable because of her interest in Japan.

In addition, there was an interconnection between favorable attitudes and integrative motivations, as reported by Csizér and Dörnyei (2005). Amber and Nicole evidenced high levels of integrativeness, remaining enthusiastic and willing learners, because of their personal interest and motivation. This further confirmed their positive attitudes. The integrative motivation which occurs when learners become genuinely involved in the foreign language and culture increases their process satisfaction thus boosting their confidence. This optimistic mindset has the effect of making people more willing to take risks and put forth more effort, thus increasing language skills.

Aligning with this, Kormos and Csizér (2008) reported that the students' characterization of learning a language as interesting helped in a positive change of attitude. A true passion towards the language on behalf of learners greater the probability of them using effective learning.

These learners thus displayed favorable attitudes to learning language because they were affected by the multilingual context. The results of the present study confirmed the positive perspective of Filipino learners in studying Japanese online, and this might be due to the country's unique multilingual culture. Understanding the factors that promote those positive attitudes is essential in striving for effective language learning as well as outcomes.

### **Motivation**

On the motivation aspect, equally, the learners' questionnaire data and interviews' data indicated that integrative reasons were the force behind students learning the foreign language online. Among online learners of Japanese participates taken place in the present study indicated that they showed pronounced integrative motivation ( $M=4.07$ ), suggesting they had strong relationship with the language on more inner feelings and emotional levels. This result aligns with the finding of Dörnyei and Csizér study (2005), namely the different moods of the participants toward the target language and its culture which have to do with the fact that they interact the target community. One of the participants from the interview, Aaron, is a perfect example of this integrative motivation: "yes it is a positive attitude I will learn a lot at the end of the given course" (Aaron, personal interview, September 2022).

Learners in the present study overwhelmingly reported high motivation level, integrative motivation being the most derived from all. To illustrate, it was the factor that Amber used to commence her online Japanese learning in the first place. She selected Japanese as a foreign language to understand the dialogue without subtitles of Japanese anime movies. At the beginning, the main reason was integrated motivation. However, after she understood the broader spectrum of language learning, she also used the benefits for her life which is instrumental motivation – to be able to work in Japan some day with her ability to use the language. Amber, in her interview, talked about a few of her friends who either were getting into the Japanese language or were familiar



with it a little bit more. She mentioned that there would be someone for her to practice and a goal to learn the language together as friends.

Moreover, the cultural aspect of the Japanese language appeared to be a significant motivating factor for learners. Integrative motivation was influenced by learners' willingness to learn the language for self-improvement. Learning a language for personal growth and enrichment, as highlighted by James, was associated with integrative motivation. He expressed, "motivation is there -- I think it's easier for me to learn because, you know, the motivation is there and, you know, I actually want to learn, there will be difficulties, especially the- how the sentences are structured, it's the reverse of English, how the verbs are at the end, and how, you know, and conjugations are very different from English and so of course there will be difficulties, but like you said if you had if you have motivation and interest in it, it somehow makes it easier to study foreign language" (James, personal interview, September, 2022).

The findings resonated with studies by Chen, Wang, and Rodway (2021) and Kormos and Csizér (2008), indicating that integrative motivation can also manifest in learners' socializing and helping friends through language learning. Adding to this conversation, Sugano and Mamolo (2021)'s emphasis on the effect of cooperative learning on attitudes and motivation, learners in the present study appreciated their language learning through socialization with peers and teachers online. This present study's contribution lies in recognizing that learners can possess both instrumental and integrative motivation, with a pronounced emphasis on integrative motivation.

In addition, the learners consistently expressed their beliefs about language learning, highlighting the critical role of motivation. While the quantitative data emphasized learning strategies, the qualitative insights shed light on learners' beliefs about mastering new vocabulary and grammar rules.

In summary, this study highlights the complexity and dynamism of motivation, revealing that learners can harbor multifaceted motivations influenced by a variety of factors. Understanding these motivations is pivotal for facilitating effective language learning experiences and outcomes.

### **Beliefs**

In modified BALLI, learners heavily emphasized the need to utilize high impact learning strategies, and they voted the "learning strategies" category the highest mean score ( $M = 4.5$ ). By providing this support, the learners with a high stake in the language learning are strongly convinced of the need for strategic approaches in language learning. One strategy that appeared to play a prominent role in all situations was learning new words twice as reported by two out of eight language learners. Aaron, an online student, emphasized the importance of understanding words after gaining proficiency in hiragana and katakana (writing systems in Japanese): "the words we understand first in my case, I realize it by reading katakana or sometimes hiragana characters (Aaron, personal interview, September, 2022). This result resonates with the point made by Tang and Tian (2015), that renowned "mastering" of communicative

skills, such as understanding and expressing is the key issue in language studying by Chinese EFL students.

Two participants disclosed that skills of grasping the writing system limitations and complications is a must. Mike stressed the importance of mastering the writing system as a foundational step before delving into other aspects of the language: “master the basics and familiarize, yeah, *katakana*, *hiragana*” (Mike, personal interview, September, 2022). Conversely, James emphasized the value of being able to read and recognize the writing system: “The first, you have to master the basics already by knowing how to decipher. As well, you can read until you find something you understand. But everything is depending on whether what happens in the future is going well” (James, personal interview, September, 2022).

This variance in perspectives emphasizes the diverse beliefs and strategies that learners employ to approach language learning. While some prioritize vocabulary acquisition, others place their values on the foundational importance of mastering the writing system. Understanding these individual beliefs is essential for tailoring language learning approaches to suit learners' needs and preferences effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

The result of this study can be used to illuminate how Filipino students who study online Japanese courses during that extremely challenging time of Covid-19 pandemic. They were eager to enjoy the experience of learning a foreign language but mainly the culture and community. They showed genuine interest and respect for the target language community. This approach of positive outlook is surfacing to be the major source of motivation, integrative motivation emerged to be the major determinant. It is noteworthy that even though integrative motivation had a higher exclamation mark among the learners, the instrumental motivation was as well present, which further highlights the fact that the study was, in this case, reflecting a balanced motivational spectrum.

In the unexampled case of the worldwide pandemic, the F2F classes were no more feasible in the Philippines starting from 2020 March to 2022 August. The data collection, which occurred in September of 2022, represents an instrumental approach to recording the state of languages held amid the prolonging issue of pandemic health. While language learning has been characteristically influenced by the meaning of the Covid-19 pandemic, these modifications have consistently been prompted by the internal and external factors of this event. Indeed, indirectly, the language teachers were in the forefront, reminding the world of their converse survival in the battle against Covid-19, according to Nissim and Simon, (2024). The importance of the teacher's level of motivation as an external factor is highlighted by being a major determinant of their motivation to fully engage in online teaching, as supported by Piramanayagam, Alanvijay and Seal (2024). According to Complex Dynamics theory, which describes language acquisition as an “adaptive” process ensuring individuals' further development based on their encounter experiences. Adaptive systems are those which stand ready to react and change when the circumstances require it and undeniably, the Covid-19

pandemic has served as one of the most important events, provoking modifications in the environment of language learning.

It is no doubt that the world has been put forward at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic to the accessibility and application of online resources. Virtual platforms occupy the most important place in the language learners' toolbox which provides learning materials, educators engagement, and interaction with their fellow learners. This, in turn, has created the online exposure frenzy which has ended up in more exposure to the factual side of the target language. By the same token, one cannot neglect the influence of the cultural immersion which brings about some changes in their attitudes, their intentions, and their beliefs.

It would be reasonable to consider the number of Japanese tourists in the Philippines as one of the factors that influence the study of Japanese by Filipino students, since in 2019 Japanese emerged as the fourth largest tourist group. While an important factor thus to be analyzed is integrative motivation for Filipino students on the online platform due to exposure to Japanese culture in cartoons and anime, an overarching influencer on Filipino learners in Japanese learning online is the net integration motivation derived from Japanese cultural exposure. The anime jumps into the topographic map of the Philippines in the last 1970s, and it develops into a proof of a cultural phenomenon. Also, the anime conventions and events started flourishing since 2000s and that's in effect tapestrying the Japanese culture further around Filipino society.

With respondents receiving Japanese anime shows and culture, this impacts on learners, developing their integrative motivation and changing their beliefs and positive attitudes toward learning the Japanese language. Anime has an immense influence on the students we research and remain among of the biggest motivational forces. Therefore, the research proposes that the cultural impact of Japan, in particular the popularity of anime, can be characterized by substantial forces guiding students into language learning towards the array of 'Complex' and 'Dynamic' theory constructs.

The current investigation holds implications for online foreign language learning during the pandemic. Complex dynamic theory explains that language learning is a multifaceted and dynamic process shaped by interconnected factors. Attitudes, motivations, and beliefs are not in isolation but are interdependent, influenced by external factors, including the pandemic, educational environment, family dynamics, and exposure to online resources.

One of the most significant contributions of this study is shedding light on the dynamic interplay of these factors, providing a valuable foundation for further exploration of learners' individual differences in online contexts. However, the study also highlights the need for extensive research on online language learning in the post-pandemic across various learning contexts to comprehend the holistic impact and variations.

In conclusion, this study represents a significant stride toward understanding the dynamics of language learning during the pandemic, offering a glimpse into the intricate relationships between perspectives, motivation, and beliefs. Further in-depth probes, employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, are warranted to reveal

the uniqueness of online language learning, especially as the world transitions from the pandemic to an endemic phase. In particular, longitudinal studies and think-aloud protocols could provide a deeper understanding of learners' perspectives, drive, and convictions, shedding lights on narratives of their language learning journey. These endeavors would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the transformative impact of online language learning in the face of global crises like the Covid-19 pandemic.

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