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Back to campus: teachers returning with digital experience

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Abstract

This paper examines the effect of teachers who returned to face-to-face classes after experiencing fully online lessons for a full year in 2020. The research was conducted in the English department of a college in Tokyo which had not kept up with digitalization and previously utilised no ICT equipment in the classroom prior to the pandemic. The increasing use of technology in Japanese higher education before and during the pandemic is well established, but this case study presents an interesting comparison as a sudden shift. The research results revealed that for more than half of the classes, teachers continue to view face-to-face classes on campus as easier to manage in terms of student interaction. Moreover, the majority of teachers returned to the classroom with classes as ICT device users and online resources while they did not consider or require students to be ICT users. The implications for digitalization in a college without a special ICT team is also discussed.

Introduction

Due to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, most of the higher education institutions in Japan decided to close their campuses to protect students, teachers, and staff while conducting classes remotely. As a result, universities and colleges faced a sudden transition from traditional face-to-face classroom teaching to fully remote online teaching. This transition asked teachers to change not only their teaching

styles but also classroom management and grading. However, the spring semester in 2021 actually started with the trend of "back to campus" in Japan. Although most classes conducted hybrid lessons and big lecture-based modules in auditoriums were still fully online, many universities and colleges decided to bring some small classes back to campus in 2021. It does not always mean teachers went back to the campus with the pre-pandemic teaching style which is all the teacher-student interaction completed in the classroom and the use of online resources and apps is not required. The stop-start nature of closures means that digitization may be inevitable, and it will continue to happen in the education industry in Japan. While more research about this major adjustment in 2020 in classrooms has been published, less research on the consequence of the transformation has been discussed. Although we were still in the middle of this adjustment, the analysis of how teachers survived and came back to the classroom once in the spring of 2021 should be examined and shared. As such this paper discusses the aftermath of the sudden digitalization in the class focusing on the language classes and how teachers came back to the campus.

Previous Literature

This chapter reviews how digitalization was promoted in Japanese schools, and then, focuses on higher education. This may allow us to see the problems of this abrupt change.

The Digitalization in Japanese School

Before focusing on higher education, here we discuss the overview of ICT use in Japanese schools in the last decade. The digitalization with ICT in the classroom was one of the main points of the Course of Study announced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology revised in 2017. The Japan's government also took the initiative with the programme called "GIGA School" in

2018, but this programme was initially designed as a series of 4-year plans[1]. These facts suggest that the government recognized the importance of digitalization in the classroom. However, it does not always mean that accelerated digitalization was happening in the late 2010s in Japan. The National Institute for Educational Policy Research published the summary of OECD PISA 2018[2], which is the survey among 15-year-old students in OECD countries and it emphasized on the fact that regarding the length of time digital devices are used during the classroom lessons, that of Japan was shorter than the OECD average. Moreover, it also focused on the fact that only 3.4% of Japanese students used the digital devices to follow up lessons against the OECD average of 21%. Using a computer to do homework was 3.0 % in Japan while OECD average was 22.2%. These facts suggested that compared to students in other countries, Japanese students had not trained to be autonomous ICT device users before the pandemic. Although "GIGA School" was proposed in 2018 and the budget was allocated for the introduction of high speed internet connection in each school to realize "1 device for 1" policy for Society 5.0 in 2019, it was after the pandemic in 2020 when the budget was finally widely discussed and focused. In 2020 and 2021, the subsidy for Edtech companies to support schools has been widely focused on.

When we focus on language learning classes, the study of computer assisted language learning (CALL) has been widely conducted and discussed by teachers. However, as a country, it can be said that the level of digitalization had been delayed in the pre-pandemic period.

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[1] Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2020) "令和3年版情報通信白書" Retrieved September 22, 2021 from URL. https://www.soumu.go.jp/johotsusintokei/whitepaper/ja/r03/pdf/n2200000.pdf

[2] National Institute for Educational Policy Research, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology(March 2019) Key Features of OECD Programme for International Student Assessment 2018 (PISA 2018) Retrieved September 22, 2021 from URL. https://www.nier.go.jp/kokusai/pisa/pdf/2018/01_point-eng.pdf

Higher Education before and during the Pandemic

The report by MEXT in 2014 had already mentioned the gap in attitudes toward digitalization among the higher education institutions. For instance, the survey conducted by the government with universities, junior colleges, and technical colleges showed that majority of these institutions had already understood the importance of introducing ICT at that time[3]. However, the report also pointed out the difference of the attitude toward introducing ICT. While 93.6 % of universities and 86.1% of junior colleges considered it as important, the report mentioned 10% of undergraduate programmes and 9.9% of junior colleges stated "not so important." 86.1% of junior colleges answered that they did not have a strategic vision of ICT introduction. When it comes to teacher training, according to the report, only 8% of universities in Japan have a teacher's group organized for ICT promotion. It can be said that the delay might be one of the reasons for the "rapid" transformation and its associated problems.

In the spring semester of 2020, many higher education institutions practiced fully online teaching. According to the survey conducted by the MEXT in May 2020, about 95.4 percent of university students experienced online lessons. The pandemic forced most of higher education institutions to conduct online teaching in the spring semester in 2020 from April to August 2020. White Paper on Information and Communication in Japan 2020 pointed out that according to the survey conducted by the MEXT, a lot of universities decided to get back to the campus in September 2020, when the autumn semester 2020 started in Japan. However, the survey also showed that 87.7 percent of university students answered they had some lessons online in December 2020. That means, although the movement of back to the campus was seen, most universities and colleges were not coming back

[3] Kyoto University (March 2014) 平成25年度文部科学省先導的大学改革推進委託事業 高等教育機関等におけるICTの利活用に関する調査研究 委託業務成果報告書Retrieved September 22, 2021 from URL. https://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/detail/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2014/05/19/1347641_01.pdf

to the traditional teaching style in the pre-pandemic period.

Many higher education institutions in Japan decided to start coming back to campus in the spring semester in 2021. However, the unforeseen COVID circumstance in Japan resulted in most universities and colleges staying hybrid lessons through the semester or getting back to fully online in some weeks during the semester. This trend is especially recognized in the institutions in big cities, including Tokyo and its metropolitan areas, after the 3rd to 5th Statement of Emergency was announced in May, July, and August 2021.

The Problems of The Sudden Transformation

While examining the policy and the overview as a whole country is important, it is also required to see the problems which each teacher has been facing due to the sudden transformation. In the research done by Todd (2020) in a university in Thailand, the potential problems which teachers faced due to the sudden transformation were categorized in different levels according to the seriousness of the problems from the areas which were not really problems to areas which remain as problems. For example, in his paper, the problems caused by the lack of suitable devices were categorized as the problems which can be solved quickly, on the other hand, the problems about teaching style and students learning, including designing suitable activities, contents, and having a time for communication with students were described as serious concerns. It can be said that converting traditional classroom exercises to online activities and assuring them of the equal quality of class would be one of the most difficult but important things which teachers faced in this sudden shift. Moreover, this analysis leads to a focus on another problem: the delay of introducing ICT in the teaching and the classrooms in the 2010s in Japan. The attitude toward ICT use in the classroom in the early 2010s might be one of the causes of stress and problems teachers faced in 2020.

Research Questions

Based on these previous studies, it can be implied that quite a lot of teachers and institutions had to practice online lessons without the extensive and strategic training. Many teachers and institutions are still looking for how to deliver each class with the possibility of coming back to the classroom and staying online. The current situation suggests we need to keep thinking about this problem for a while. Therefore, sharing and discussing the experiences of teachers who experienced full online in 2020 and returned to the campus in the spring semester of 2021 should be examined and discussed.

The following questions are discussed:
-What equipment did teachers adopt after coming back from fully online to classroom?
-How did the teachers feel about returning to face-to-face teaching after experiencing online lessons in terms of preparation and class management?

Methods

The research was conducted in the English department of a 2-year college in Tokyo. The department welcomes up to 90 students every year. Until the pandemic started in the early spring in 2020 in Japan, all the classes had been delivered only face-to-face in the classrooms. As Figure 1 shows, all the classes were offered online in 2020 mainly relying on the video meeting application “Zoom” and a learning platform application “Google Classroom.”

However, in April 2021, the department decided to start all the classes on campus. In order to make this possible, the department made the maximum number of the students in each language-practice class to half of what it used to be. Also, for stu-

dents who were not able to come to campus due to health concerns, the department asked teachers to conduct hybrid lessons and connect the student to the classroom via zoom live. However, due to the COVID pandemic, the department again decided to shift fully online in May 2021. After the end of the State of Emergency in Tokyo in June, all the classes again came back to campus. The questionnaire was conducted in early July, which is before the start of the 4th State of Emergency.

Figure 1. The class delivery after the pandemic

2020 Spring Semester	2020 Autumn Semester	2021 Spring Semester		
April - July Online	September - February Online	April On-campus	May Online	June July On-campus

Participants

The participants of the research were 27 teachers. 3 of them are full-time and 24 teachers worked part-time. 25 of them have two to ten skill-based language classes in the college and 2 were for Japanese subject classes teaching sociology, philosophy, and Japanese academic writing. They ranged from 31 to 65 years old and hailed from various countries including Australia, Canada, Ireland, Japan, Ukraine, the UK, and the USA. When they were assigned to the class in 2020, there was no criteria of digital knowledge or the past experience of teaching with ICT. It can be said that teachers had little or no experience teaching with ICT in the college before 2020 even though most part-time teachers generally teach several higher institutions. The college did not have a strategic digitalization plan. As a result, no opportunities for online teaching training were available until 2020. In 2020, the department decided to go fully online. The department gave a google account for each teacher which was connected to zoom and all the Google Workplace for Ed-

[4] Google Workplace for Education Fundamentals were at that time called “GSuite for Education.”

ucation[4].

Equipment and Facilities before 2020

Before 2020, each full-time teacher had their desktop computers and five desktop computers in the teachers room were available for part-time teachers. With these shared computers, part-time teachers were able to access the internet, print the worksheet, or prepare for the class. The department was able to use 12 classrooms at the same time: 4 of them had WiFi and 8 of them had an ethernet cable. Although each classroom had a CD and DVD player to use materials attached to the textbooks, no laptops or tablets were offered by the school. The number of projectors and monitors were also limited, so not all the classes were able to use them at the same time. Two teachers regularly used their own laptops in the classroom and connected the devices to the projector or monitor to show the files to the students. The college has a computer room mainly used for the Microsoft Office skill practice classes. The classes were elective and offered twice a week.

Equipment and Facilities after 2020

The department brought classes back to the campus in 2021 with several new devices including laptops and tablets for teachers. Monitors were available in every classroom. During the summer break in 2021, WiFi was installed and available in all the classrooms.

The online workshop for online teaching was offered in the beginning and the end of the semesters. The workshops for the students were offered before the semester and students were taught how to use zoom and google classroom in a small group.

Student-Teacher contact outside the classroom

Before the pandemic, students had limited opportunities to contact the teachers, such as visiting them directly in the teachers' room before and after the class or waiting for the class next week. When the college admin needed to contact the students, making a phone call, sending an email, or using the school LINE app ac-

count was popular, however, this type of students' information was not available for teachers. The learning management system was available, however, it was only used for the attendance and the grading record. No class used the system for submitting assignments.

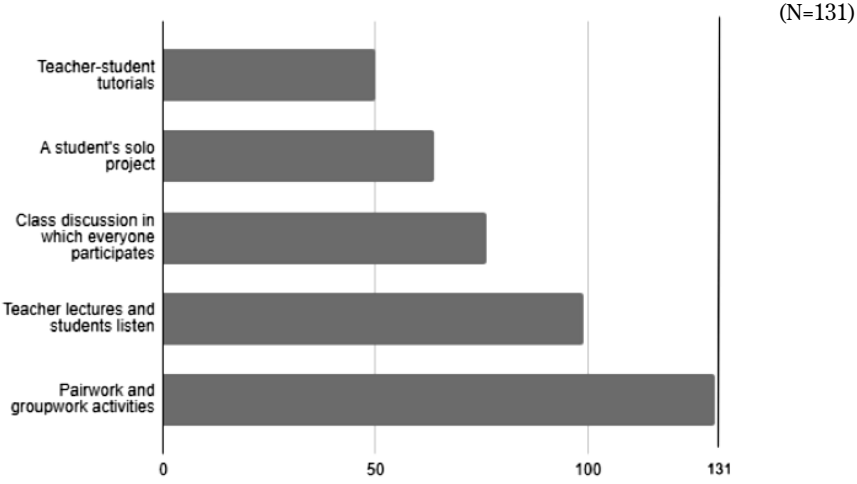
Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted in early July after all the participants experienced both online and on-campus teaching. The 27 participants were asked to answer the survey questions for each of their classes. This is due to the difference of pedagogical styles and class' s characteristics. As a result, 131 answer sheets were collected. The participants were asked to answer multiple choice questions and open-ended questions with 5 categories of questions: teaching styles, equipment, apps, class preparation, class management. The printed questionnaire was distributed so that teachers were able to add comments if they have any concerns related to the topic.

Results

Since the research was conducted in the English department, the classes are mostly related to language skills, which required each student to practice their language skills through pair and group work activities as Figure 2 shows. During the online period, on-demand classes where teachers record their lecture and students watch it when they can were not conducted at all.

Figure 2. The number of teachers' answers about their teaching style (multiple answers)



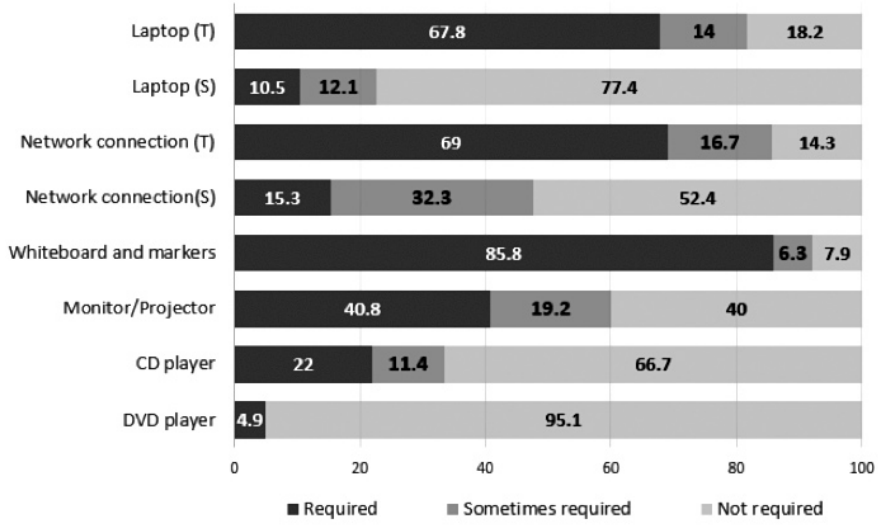
The ongoing digitalization

Figure 3 shows the answer to the question "what equipment do you use in this class on campus?" and how many percent of teachers (n=131) consider they are required, sometimes required, and not required. As it is mentioned before, the college did not offer the school laptop for teachers, but now the majority of teachers consider a laptop as a required equipment. The percentage of teachers who require a teacher's laptop and a network connection for a teacher was similar, while the percentage of the use of a monitor/projector was comparatively low. One teacher commented that he brought a laptop and kept the teaching log during the class and posted the log on Google Classroom, which allowed both the teacher and the students to review what they did in the previous lessons. Although CD and DVD players were "must" items before the pandemic, now laptops seem to be used instead of them. Even though they have experienced online teaching and now projectors and laptops are available, teachers required a whiteboard and markers in more than 85% of classes.

Many teachers think students do not need to bring laptops. However, nearly a half of teachers think the internet connection is required or sometimes required for

students. Some teachers also mentioned that students did vocabulary tests which can be accessed with their smartphones alongside work from the textbook and other teachers also said they occasionally used word games online to build vocabulary. However, there was no comment about students using ICT devices autonomously.

Figure 3.The percentage of equipment use in the classroom in teachers' points of view



Online teaching v.s. on-campus teaching

As Figure 4 shows, for about 50% of classes, teachers think the preparation time did not change in both cases. However, the teachers who commented "more time" in on-campus teaching pointed out the amount of time or making paper copies or setting a monitor or projector in the classroom.

As for the class management, for the majority of the classes, the teachers think on-campus classes are easier. Many teachers also commented that it is easier to get students to talk together in face-to-face classes. Most popular types of comments were regarding students' understanding and concentration. One teacher

pointed out that he feels students get a deeper understanding of each other face to face than through zoom. Another teacher mentioned students seemed less distracted in the classrooms. One pronunciation teacher pointed out that returning on campus made the class much easier because the teacher thought "an effective pronunciation class for me involves physical interactions and students seem more satisfied as they are monitored more in detail on campus." However, different views and problems were also raised. For example, one teacher who also had pronunciation teaching class said returning on campus made the lesson harder because "students have to wear masks" and the teacher cannot show or check the mouth, which was deeply related to the quality of teaching.

The teacher who felt on-campus lessons were harder pointed out the sanitary concerns such as taking care of students' masking or distance during the pair and group work activities. One teacher raised "time spent on policing half-masking."

Moreover, returning to campus led teachers to be aware of the problems which was not obvious while seeing students via zoom. One teacher commented "I find

Figure 4. The teacher's view of returning on campus affected to their preparation time

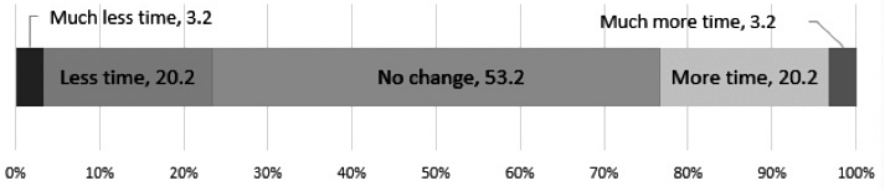
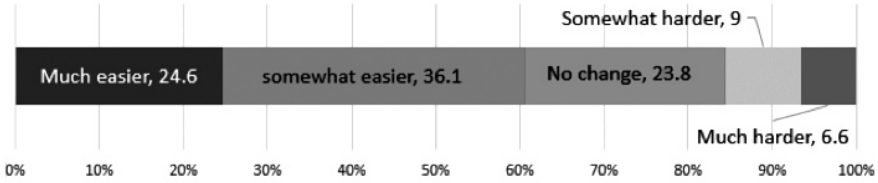


Figure 5. The teacher's view of returning on campus affected to their class management



it a little difficult to motivate them at times. I don't notice that on zoom."

Finally, the question asking the use of apps in the classroom revealed that in 87.2% of classes teachers kept using Google Classroom even after coming back to the campus. The most popular comments were that teachers used Google Classroom as a communication platform with their students. They post the announcement and the teaching log so students "can keep track with their progress." However, that means about 10% of classes stopped using Google classroom after returning to the campus. There were 3 comments stating they stopped using Google Classroom during the on-campus period and never used it.

Discussion

For the first research question regarding the equipment, the fact that the majority of classes required teachers' laptops and internet connection suggested that the experience of online teaching and this unforeseen situation affected teachers' teaching styles and probably this is one of the reasons why teachers came back to the classrooms with ICT. However, it does not always mean that all the classes are now fully digitalized. Firstly, the lower rate of requirement of students' ICT devices and network connection may suggest that the ICT use in the classroom is mainly teacher-driven and students are not regarded as autonomous uses of ICT devices in the classroom yet. Another thing to be considered is the suspension of online resources which was recognized after coming back to campus. As the data in the result section showed, we cannot ignore the fact that more than 30% of the classes whose teachers think laptops or internet connections are not always necessary, and 10% of classes which stopped using online platforms.

For the second research question regarding the teachers' attitude toward returning to campus, the research revealed that they put emphasis on the importance of physical interaction in the classroom, which leads to the positive attitude to-

wards on-campus lessons in terms of class management. Since pairwork and groupwork activities are adopted in almost all classes in this college, students' reaction in the classroom is a key element of class management and their attitude toward on-campus lessons.

The teachers' preferable attitudes toward face-to-face teaching was recognized this time, however, it should be also noted that the research was conducted in the college which has not been highly digitalized for a long time before the pandemic and most classes focused on language skills. The result might be diverse and different if the research would be conducted in the different types of higher education institutions. For further understanding, other factors such as each teachers' ICT knowledge level and attitude should be examined. For the second research question regarding teachers' feelings, as Figure 4 and 5 revealed, a certain number of classes were regarded better face-to-face. Although this time the participants mainly raised the opportunity of students' physical contact for this, more research will be required to examine this preference. At this point, it is difficult to conclude that face-to-face interaction is the sole reason for this.

Conclusion

Although the experience of online teaching and the ongoing unpredictability made teachers bring ICT devices in the classroom, it does not always mean that their teaching transforms online-based. In the classroom, students are not required to be autonomous ICT users yet and activities in the classes are still considered better face-to-face. The importance of face-to-face classes on campus has not decreased. Teachers' comments about the importance of physical interaction also imply that for current teachers and students the opportunities of having lessons face-to-face are still demanded. However, teachers have to still take care of the classroom safety against COVID-19, which causes another stress to the teach-

ers. Also, the facts pointed out by the previous literature suggest that regardless of the pandemic more digitalization will be required in Japanese higher education and among its students with the strategic vision assuring the quality of classes. Considering the fact that we teachers and students are still facing the unforeseen situation and have to adjust the class in both online and on-campus, further study should be conducted. More and more research should be done.

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