



Original Article

Comparison of Students' Learning Behaviors in Face-to-Face and Online Lectures (Case Study: 2019 Cohort Students of Japanese Studies Program, Airlangga University)

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Abstract:

This article discusses the phenomenon of online learning, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has compelled various sectors, including education, to adapt. In higher education, Japanese language learning has inevitably been conducted online. The sudden acceleration due to the pandemic has inevitably led to changes in students' learning methods. This article investigates how students of the Japanese Studies Program at Airlangga University, particularly the 2019 cohort, adapt to new learning habits from the perspective of technological determinism by Marshall McLuhan. The study employs a qualitative method, conducting interviews with five students. The results reveal that changes in teaching methods by Japanese language course instructors triggered changes in students' learning approaches. These adjustments aimed to facilitate the teaching-learning process in an online setting. However, online learning posed challenges such as distractions, fatigue, and the absence of direct discussion with peers. To overcome these obstacles, students adopted alternative strategies to understand Japanese grammar patterns.

Keywords: Japanese language, remote learning, technological determinism



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Introduction

Various platforms to support online learning are widely available on the internet. Nearly all schools and universities conduct their teaching and learning activities using these platforms as educational media. In the future, this method of learning is expected to become increasingly popular as people gravitate toward activities that do not require them to leave their homes. Moreover, the development of distance learning will be

increasingly supported by technology, which is predicted to become more advanced and efficient. This new learning medium offers convenience for its users, allowing them to access and connect from anywhere with a stable internet connection. While the main advantage of online learning lies in its practicality for both learners and instructors, ensuring the quality of online education remains a challenge due to the differences in interaction between online and face-to-face classes. Various issues are likely to arise in online classes, ranging from technical problems, such as instructors' lack of proficiency with the applications used and unstable internet signals, to non-technical challenges, such as numerous distractions during classes.

These obstacles are also experienced by foreign language learners, especially those studying Japanese. In foreign language learning, students are required not only to understand concepts or theories but also to practice grammatical structures. Japanese, with its distinct sentence structure compared to Indonesian or English, requires learners to spend time adjusting to its grammatical patterns. Language is also closely tied to how a culture is expressed. In Japanese, for instance, sentence context cannot be separated from the habits of Japanese people. This includes the use of polite versus casual sentences, where speakers must understand whether a sentence is appropriate for the context.

The need to comprehend a sentence is more easily conveyed in face-to-face lectures. However, understanding material in online Japanese language courses poses significant challenges for learners. To understand how these challenges are addressed and to examine how students adapt their learning behaviors to cope with online lectures, the author conducted interviews with respondents. These respondents were 2019 cohort students in the Japanese Studies Program at Airlangga University. This cohort experienced both face-to-face and online lectures, which led the author to assume that there were changes in how these students overcame obstacles encountered in online classes. This research involved interviews with five students.

Technological Determinism: A Perspective by Marshall McLuhan

Technological determinism is a theory introduced by Marshall McLuhan concerning the role of media in society. McLuhan argued that media shapes society and significantly impacts its ecosystem, independent of social, economic, cultural, or political factors. The foundational premise of technological determinism posits that technology is the key force in structuring society. Social structures are seen as conditions formed by innovation and technology. This perspective emerged in the 1950s when the evolution of media technology facilitated greater accessibility to information for all societal layers. Furthermore, humanity's reliance on modern information and communication technologies transformed the world into what McLuhan termed the *global village* (Tremblay, 2012). With the advent of instant and virtual information technologies, human interaction increasingly required intermediaries or mediums. Fundamentally, McLuhan suggested that technological innovation alters human behavior, specifically in communication patterns, thereby transforming how messages are exchanged. Innovations in communication technologies have led to profound cultural changes.

According to McLuhan, the theory of technological determinism is built upon

three key ideas:

1. The invention of new communication technologies catalyzes cultural change.
2. Changes in human communication shape the existence of human life.
3. Humans create tools for their needs, but eventually, these tools begin to shape their creators.

This theory has evolved alongside advancements in communication and information technologies, particularly with the emergence of the internet.

The advancement of the internet as a technological innovation has greatly facilitated long-distance human interaction. The internet has effectively eliminated spatial boundaries, enabling communication across vast distances. From the internet emerged social media platforms that allow humans to network, interact, and form new communities without spatial constraints. Social media, as a new medium, enables unprecedented types of interaction. It connects people globally, transcending physical limits, thanks to complex algorithms that make such connectivity possible. According to McQuail (2011), new media platforms decentralize communication messages, with satellite distribution enhancing audience engagement through interconnected networks and computers. With advancements in technology, individuals no longer require computers to connect online; smartphones, which now function as miniature computers, suffice. This shift has resulted in significant changes, as social media interactions now occur within the reach of one's fingertips.

Numerous studies have examined technological determinism, including research by Oliver, who analyzed the relationship between education and technology from the perspective of technological determinism. His work, a theoretical critique, explored the conceptual link between technology and education through four socio-cultural theoretical lenses: activity theory, communities of practice, actor-network theory, and social construction of technology. Oliver's research identified alternative frameworks for understanding the relationship between technology and education. The study concluded that it is vital to develop deeper insights into this relationship while identifying other potential methodological approaches. Each perspective provides unique explanations, for example, activity theory emphasizes systems over technological elements, SCOT highlights intentionality but underestimates how technology shapes practices, communities of practice focus on narrowly constrained group actions, and actor-network theory explains social practices at the expense of underlying reasons.

Another study on technological determinism in education, titled *Surabaya Students' Experiences with Changes in Communication Processes in Online Learning Systems*, employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine students' activities during online learning. The study concluded that students faced challenges in comprehending material. The first difficulty was adapting to new systems of learning, assignments, and examinations. The second challenge was technical issues, such as unstable internet connectivity that disrupted classes. However, despite these difficulties, participants appreciated the convenience of online learning, which allowed them to continue discussions and complete tasks without face-to-face

meetings.

Online Learning for Language Students

Through advancements in information and communication technology, various platforms have emerged to facilitate long-distance interactions. While these platforms existed prior to the pandemic, their full potential was realized only when the pandemic struck. Initially designed to support business meetings, these platforms eventually expanded into the education sector. The utilization of information technology for learning access during the pandemic has indeed facilitated remote interactions. However, this sudden shift in teaching and learning habits, prompted by the pandemic, also introduced several challenges.

The challenges encountered in online learning can be categorized into technical and non-technical issues. Technical challenges often involve unstable internet connectivity, additional costs for purchasing data plans, and device compatibility issues. Non-technical challenges are associated with learners' difficulty in maintaining focus and dealing with distractions, such as their home environment and surroundings, particularly for students learning Japanese.

Unlike Indonesian or English, which do not have speech levels, the Japanese language features varying levels of politeness depending on the context. Determining when and how to use specific sentences heavily relies on situational awareness. This complexity poses significant difficulties for self-taught learners of Japanese, who often lack the guidance of a teacher or native speaker to evaluate their sentence construction.

An effective Japanese language instructor is someone who is not only proficient in the language but also knowledgeable about Japanese culture. Explaining the contextual nuances of complex sentences becomes even more challenging in the absence of face-to-face learning, significantly impacting students' ability to comprehend grammar. Xiao Yan Li and Katsuhiko Umemoto (2010) highlighted this issue in their study, noting that Japanese language learners often understand linguistic structures but fail to grasp the intended meaning conveyed by native speakers during testing. This gap is attributed to the ambiguities and implicit expressions unfamiliar to students.

A study conducted by Dongmei Jin and Yiping Li (2020), titled *Teaching Model for College Learners of Japanese Based on Online Learning*, further identified several obstacles faced by learners. These include weak technical support, such as unstable internet connections, and the additional financial burden of purchasing internet data. Moreover, the learning materials or textbooks used were not specifically designed for online sessions, requiring students to exert extra effort in understanding the content. Consequently, both learners and instructors struggled with low evaluation rates, as it became challenging to measure their success in online learning environments effectively.

Methods

The research utilized a qualitative methodology, designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the changes in students' learning behaviors. The study involved conducting in-depth interviews with five participants from the 2019 cohort of the Japanese Studies Program at Airlangga University. These participants were specifically selected due to their exposure to both face-to-face and online learning environments, enabling the exploration of their adaptive strategies during the transition to online learning prompted by the pandemic.

The selection of a qualitative approach aligns with the need to examine individual behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions in a holistic and detailed manner, as emphasized by Moleong (2011). The data collected through these interviews were systematically analyzed and descriptively presented to elucidate the participants' adaptive strategies, the challenges encountered, and their comparative perceptions of traditional versus online learning methodologies. By adopting this approach, the study provides nuanced insights into the complexities of online learning, particularly in the context of mastering Japanese grammar. Additionally, it highlights the intersection of technological determinism with educational practices, shedding light on the broader implications for teaching and learning in digitally-mediated environments.

Results

Changes of Learning Methods

All five respondents indicated that their learning behaviors underwent significant changes, primarily driven by shifts in teaching methods within the classroom. Nindi described that before the pandemic, during face-to-face lectures, Japanese language learning followed a structured sequence. Lectures began with the instructor delivering material, followed by students creating example sentences, and concluding with exercises from textbooks. The session then proceeded with a review of the completed exercises.

Bagus noted that the pre-pandemic teaching methods did not pose significant challenges. However, after transitioning to online classes, he found the new methods more effective in facilitating comprehension compared to traditional approaches. During online Japanese language sessions, instructors grouped students into teams, each tasked with presenting grammar patterns or structures from a specific chapter of the textbook. The presentation was followed by student-led discussions and Q&A sessions. The instructor acted as a facilitator, providing clarification on implicit elements of grammar and supplementing any gaps in the group's presentations.

This approach required each group to master the assigned material thoroughly to present it effectively to their peers. Consequently, students were compelled to delve deeper into the subject matter to ensure their explanations were clear and comprehensible. Additionally, this method encouraged maximum effort from students to achieve good grades.

Unlike the pre-pandemic period, when students would passively attend lectures and rely on the instructor for material delivery, online classes demanded proactive preparation. Students assigned to present were required to prepare the material in advance. The respondents collectively viewed this new learning method positively, considering it more effective, and expressed a desire for its continuation

even if face-to-face lectures were to resume.

Changes in Study Habits

The shift in teaching methods during online classes also altered the respondents' study habits. Before the pandemic, they admitted to only taking notes during Japanese language lectures, without additional preparation or review outside class. Preparations were typically limited to weekly quizzes conducted as learning evaluations. However, the new methods necessitated advance preparation for presentations, requiring students to research and understand the scheduled material beforehand.

The material for these presentations was often sourced from diverse platforms, including Japanese language learning websites like *wkwk-japan* and grammar-focused YouTube videos. Additionally, some respondents utilized language-learning applications. For instance, Luna employed an app called *Tandem* to find language exchange partners. This platform connects users with native speakers of their target language; for example, an Indonesian user learning Japanese is paired with a native Japanese speaker learning Indonesian. Through these interactions, Luna was able to inquire about Japanese grammar directly within the app.

During the information era, technology has provided numerous alternatives for Japanese language learners. They are no longer limited to traditional resources such as textbooks or instructors but can also access knowledge through online interactions with others, utilizing chat platforms and language-learning tools.

Challenges of Study

Adapting to new learning habits inevitably presents challenges. Throughout their previous education, students were accustomed to face-to-face interactions. Thus, it is unsurprising that they encountered several obstacles during the transition to online learning. The first challenge was the absence of direct peer discussions. Respondents noted that they were unable to engage in face-to-face conversations with classmates for collaborative learning. To address this limitation, they resorted to conference calls or group phone discussions, a strategy also adopted in other courses due to its flexibility.

The second challenge involved distractions. One respondent, Lala, admitted that during online classes, she often engaged in other activities and struggled to maintain focus. These distractions primarily stemmed from smartphone usage for purposes unrelated to the lecture. In contrast, such behavior was unlikely in face-to-face settings, where the classroom environment fostered a stronger learning atmosphere, and the presence of instructors provided a sense of authority that discouraged inattentiveness.

The third challenge was boredom. Hika described how prolonged screen time, especially during consecutive class sessions, led to feelings of monotony. This sense of fatigue was exacerbated when the presenting group failed to deliver clear and

engaging explanations, leaving other students feeling as though their time was wasted.

These challenges highlight the significant adjustments required of students in adapting to the online learning environment and underscore the need for strategies to improve engagement and reduce distractions.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the discussions above, it can be concluded that changes in teaching methods introduced by the instructors of Japanese language courses have triggered shifts in students' learning approaches. These changes primarily involve the preparation required of students before attending classes. Unlike the pre-pandemic period, where instructors served as the primary source of material delivery, students now need to prepare materials in advance.

Although many students found these new methods beneficial, challenges persisted. The author argues that these challenges would have been far less likely to occur in a face-to-face learning environment. Technology, however, has enabled the development of innovative learning alternatives that were previously unavailable. Despite the conveniences offered by online learning, the respondents expressed a clear preference for the resumption of face-to-face classes.

Suggestion

Future research could build upon the findings of this study by delving into various aspects of online learning to broaden the understanding of its dynamics and implications. Longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of online learning on students' academic performance, engagement, and self-directed learning behaviors. This approach would provide valuable insights into whether the behavioral changes observed during the transition to online learning are sustained over time or diminish once face-to-face classes resume. Given the significant role of technology in online learning, future research could explore how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence or virtual reality, might enhance student engagement and minimize distractions. This is particularly relevant for language learning, where interactive and immersive experiences are crucial for mastering complex grammatical structures and cultural nuances.

By exploring these areas, future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and limitations of online learning, paving the way for more effective and inclusive educational practices in an increasingly digitalized world.

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