〔Note〕

A Case Study of Online Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic — How a Bespoke Online Approach Can Affect Collaboration, Motivation and Student Performance

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Abstract

This research note examines the online teaching context in Japan as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and how students and teachers experienced it. It briefly explores the existing literature surrounding online study and how this links to group study, motivation and learner autonomy.

It also contains a reflection on an English class activity conducted online via the 'Zoom' meeting application in the form of a case study of a Japanese university English class. Since the motivation, collaboration and performance of students in this class had begun to decline, partly due to the adapted traditional classroom materials, I decided to change them.

I opted to use the online environment itself as a starting point and to move away from the idea of "*How can I teach X online?*" towards "*What does the online environment best enable me to teach?*" The class content（the game *Scattergories*）was thus chosen specifically in consideration of the limitations and features of the Zoom platform and the online learning experience more generally.

Conceiving of the class in this way created a natural, enjoyable class for students. Rather than compromising it, the suitability of the Zoom interface actually improved the activity and resulted in better student collaboration, motivation and performance.

Introduction

On the 16th January 2020, Japan recorded its first case of the novel COVID-19 coronavirus（World Health Organization, 2020）. At the time of writing（August 2020）, Japan has had over 34,000 cases of the virus and over 1000 deaths（Japan Ministry of Health, 2020）and, following a period of decline, the number of new cases is once again on the rise.

As the virus began to gather speed towards the end of March, most Japanese universities rushed to make changes in order to protect students and teachers. More than two thirds introduced some form of online classes（Mainichi, 2020a）in the April-July spring semester with many opting to continue online learning in the autumn. It is worth noting that before the virus outbreak, it was very uncommon for Japanese universities to offer any type of remote learning（ibid）and so this was an unprecedented move for higher education in Japan.

Teachers and students were therefore, for the most part, unaccustomed

to teaching and studying online, not only in terms of experience but also in terms of equipment. Universities worried that students and teachers would not have adequate Internet connections and that students in particular would be reliant on smartphones as opposed to desktop or laptop computers in order to take classes.

Furthermore, since the virus was affecting everyone in society, it was also likely for multiple members of the same household to be working or studying at home simultaneously, perhaps with only one desktop computer or laptop between them. To make matters worse, towards the end of March, both online and offline retailers in Japan began to sell out (or dramatically increase prices) of essential components such as webcams, microphones and even computers themselves.

As such, some universities initially suggested an asynchronous learning method. This involves teachers writing or recording lessons and students studying the material by themselves at a convenient time. It was thought that this would give households more flexibility around use of scarce technological resources and that students who did not have the fast internet connections and/or large data packages required by online streamed classrooms would still be able to study.

However, what would seem to be the case (although this is anecdotal and there is, as of yet, little publicly-available data or research yet to support this) is that many students were unsatisfied with replacing the synchronous learning environment of the university classroom with completing tasks via Word documents, Google Forms and online portals. Teachers also seemed to find producing the new asynchronous materials laborious and the workload in administering them, checking responses and providing feedback to

be high.

Additionally, it began to appear that some concerns about students using smartphones to study were overstated and that the functionality of online meeting services such as Zoom and Google Classroom on smartphones was enough that they could be used for most synchronous online tasks. This is particularly relevant in Japan where 87.8% of those in their 20s prefer to access the internet using a smartphone as opposed to a laptop or desktop PC（Japan Times, 2018）.

Finally, some of the logistical pressures were eased by the technology companies themselves. Zoom lifted the 40-minute limit on meetings with 3 or more participants for academic institutions in March（Zoom, 2020）and in April the major Japanese network providers waived data fees up to 50gb for those under 25 years old（Mainichi, 2020b）. Additionally, many universities began to provide additional facilities such as Google Classroom accounts, upgraded Zoom licenses, laptops for students and grants or loans to purchase technological equipment.

Consequently, more and more classes were being taught online synchronously to groups of students using video streaming technology. This presented its own set of challenges for both teachers and students, most of whom were unaccustomed to the format. Many teachers had already written lessons or were stuck with textbooks that were produced with face-to-face classrooms in mind and with little time or few resources with which to make changes. As a result, many teachers spoke of *'damage limitation'* or *'doing one's best'* as opposed to seeing these classes as an opportunity for innovation and creative pedagogy.

First Impressions of the Online Environment

When the pandemic necessitated the movement of all spring semester classes at my university online, I opted to teach the vast majority of them via the online meeting service Zoom as this seemed to allow me to best replicate the traditional classroom. This presented several challenges, both logistical and personal.

Compared to the traditional classroom, I soon found that students in general were noticeably quieter in Zoom classes and more reluctant to ask questions. Exercises would take longer to complete and transitions between activities could also be time-consuming. There would be somewhat regular technology issues, such as dropped connections or non-functional audio or video. It was also much harder to ascertain students' level and almost impossible to monitor *who* was actually completing students' homework assignments. Testing was logistically difficult and the veracity of test scores was difficult to confirm.

Both I and all my students used a web camera during Zoom sessions and this was agreed on at the beginning of the course. None expressed any objection to doing so although I cannot discount the possibility that some would have rather not used a camera (although this would have made communication-based lessons considerably more difficult). I found seeing my own image on screen to be quite uncomfortable and I was often conscious of being "watched". Students confided in me that they felt the same way. I was aware that in many cases, the background on the camera was students' private dwellings and, thus, privacy concerns were not to be ignored either. I allowed students to use a Virtual Background, although not all had suffi-

cient computer processing power to enable this feature.

Nevertheless, beyond the obvious benefit in protecting students against the virus, there were also some positive elements of online classes and these more often than not came because of the technology rather than in spite of it. For example, using screen sharing to give presentations was effective and efficient, led to students making better eye contact with listeners and the pacing of presentations was better than it generally had been in offline classes.

Breakout rooms (smaller group rooms that students could be placed into for discussion tasks) provided a kind of 'safe haven', out of sight of the large group, in which students could more freely and confidently express themselves, which is difficult to recreate in an open classroom. For students taking class together for the first time, this was particularly valuable. Students in classroom learning environments typically do not enjoy speaking in front of the whole of the class (Young 1991) and this appeared to only be exacerbated online, so the breakout rooms worked well in alleviating this problem.

Further to this, the chat box provided a convenient and less intimidating way in which for students to ask written questions or report issues. These could be directed to the whole group or privately to the teacher and it was used on several occasions, both at the behest of the teacher and from the students' own volition.

Overall, however, it was clear that most online classes were unable to provide the same level of education as had been previously possible in the classroom, especially since the uncertainty of the situation and tight timescales resulting from the pandemic did not allow for significant modification to syllabi. It was certainly the case that students were more reticent to speak in

online classes, that we were able to cover less material and that less was learned as a result. Both students' and teachers' motivation was undoubtedly impacted in the process.

Literature Review

Online learning and its various lexical derivatives refer in principle to the whole gamut of learning that takes place remotely via an internet connection. In practice, it can be broadly split into three areas: asynchronous independent study, asynchronous interactive study and simultaneous or synchronous interactive study (Ryan 2001).

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, online education has been a part of the educational sphere that has experienced rapid growth in recent years (Lee 2017). Though this has happened in particular within higher education (Curtis and Lawson 2001), Japanese universities have been relatively slow to adopt online classes, placing a greater importance on synchronous classes delivered in a physical classroom (Jung & Suzuki 2006) and "teacher-directed learning" (Richardson and Swan 2003), which it has been argued is "preferred by many [Japanese] learners" (Jung, Kudo and Choi 2012 p 3).

Early proponents of online learning in research literature such as Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek (2000) have been outspoken as to the benefits it has to offer, particularly in terms of its accessibility. McEwen (1997) came to a similarly positive conclusion, saying that the online environment has the capacity to bolster learning beyond what can be achieved using exclusively a conventional classroom approach.

Online students are able to learn from anywhere and, in the case of asyn-

chronous materials, at any time（Richardson and Swan 2003）. They can do this at a pace appropriate to them as individual learners, particularly important for those studying in a non-native or unfamiliar language（Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek 2000）, as is the case with most university English language course participants in Japan. It has also been said that the online environment is more accommodating, providing a more democratic platform for shy students or those who learn at a slower pace（Clark 2003）.

Some have even gone as far to say that online learning may be preferable. Several studies such as those by Fjermestad（2004）and Cacciamani（2010）found that university students working together online in fact achieved higher scores in testing than their counterparts in physical discussion groups. They state that these students studying online were able to have more complex discussions on a wider range of topics and to make more reasoned and effective judgments following online tasks.

That is not to say that the online learning environment does not present serious challenges. It is clear that students who are unfamiliar with using technology may find studying online particularly challenging. Al-Fudail & Meller refer to this as "techno-stress"（2008）. This can also extend to teachers who may struggle to find a way to incorporate this required technology into their syllabus and to adapt it to their existing teaching style（ibid）.

Jung, Kudo & Choi（2012）found that, although stress is not necessarily detrimental to a student and not all students may react to stress in the same way, negative stress can occur across a number of dimensions in learners studying online. The first of these, mentioned already, is technology, which can encompass anxiety about a lack of technical skill, a lack of experience, feelings of discomfort or simply a dislike of studying online（ibid）.

Secondly, collaboration itself can be a source of stress, involving elements such as a lack of trust in other students' commitment to shared work or the slow pace at which relationships tend to be built online (ibid). Finally, students may find time management, understanding tasks or simply their lack of English ability to be particularly problematic when studying online (ibid). Additionally, others have described the potential for online learners to suffer from learner isolation from being physically distant from their classmates (Brown 1996) or to become frustrated and confused (Hara and Kling 2000).

Building on these fears of isolation it is perhaps especially important to consider the relative importance of the group as opposed to the individual in Japan. Group work is a mainstay of traditional Japanese school and university classrooms and is reflective of the Japanese mind-set which largely values group cohesion over individual opinions (Swan and Smith 2001) and so collaboration is especially important for Japanese learners (Hammond 2007).

Group work can be loosely split into what Dillenbourg and Schneider (1995) characterize as *collaborative* and *cooperative* types of learning, the chief difference between them being that cooperative learning involves the splitting of tasks for students to tackle independently where collaboration requires students to work together on the same task. Clearly, under these two definitions, a collaborative environment is likely to lead to greater discussion and verbal interaction. It is also likely to lead to increased student autonomy (Henri and Rigault 1996) and other cognitive benefits (Pressley & McCormick 1995). Richardson and Swan (2003) discuss the benefit that the online environment provides in allowing for the roles of teachers and students to be transformed. This role transformation leads to the teacher becoming

more facilitative, as opposed to simply acting as a lecturer, and students becoming more active learners.

Where the teacher takes a more passive role, learner autonomy becomes perhaps more important than ever. Holec (1981) defined autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning", although Benson (2011) notes that there has been less discussion of autonomy within an online context. Eneau and Develotte (2012) did more recently write about how autonomy is encapsulated in online learners. Part of their nuanced description of autonomy and online learning is that there exists, at the same time, a group autonomy and individual autonomy for online learners which develop alongside each other. They also claim that learner autonomy is particularly important in the online context and note that it can take time to develop. Finally, they emphasise the role of the group itself in building learner autonomy since individual students have to find their place within the group before becoming more autonomous themselves.

The greater involvement that students play in shaping and creating their own learning online invariably leads to greater collaboration through verbal exchanges (Pressley & McCormick 1995). For such online collaboration to be successful, it is argued that students' social interaction must be established at an early stage (Kim and Bonk 2002), which can be difficult when students are unfamiliar with each other, nervous or shy.

It has been claimed that, for Japanese learners, this group mentality found in physical classes is not present to such an extent within the online context (Jung, Kudo and Choi 2012) although it might simply be the case that online learning in Japan is relatively new (ibid). Certainly, there seems to be no immediate reason as to why these group-centred features of physical Japanese

classrooms could not be transferred to online classes if the right measures are taken.

Some studies have in fact shown this, although not exclusively within the Japanese context. Morse (2003) found in an exploratory case study that interaction and working together with other learners is of significant importance to Asian learners in online classrooms. Another study into Japanese online distance learners did find students specifically expressing a preference for "more social interaction when learning [online]" (Bray, Aokyi & Dlugosh 2008).

Finally, learner motivation within the online context must be considered. Dörnyei and Otto's Process Model of L2 Motivation (1998) is a particularly useful framework through which to examine how EFL teachers can create motivation. The model comprises three stages, a Preactional Phase, Actional Phase and Postactional Phase. The Preactional Phase involves the setting of goals and intentions, the Actional Phase involves the generation and implementation of tasks and subtasks and the Postactional phase involves evaluating performance and creating plans for future actions.

The online environment presents difficulties for motivation in all three of these phases. Since participants are all remote from one another, it can be difficult to establish goals and intentions in the Preactional Phase since students may be less invested in the online course before it actually starts. Communication can be difficult initially and students with multiple online courses are likely to have an overwhelming number of administrative tasks at the beginning of the online semester.

It is also challenging to appraise students in the Actional Phase since it is more difficult to ascertain who is completing students' work when study is

undertaken online. Tasks given to students may take longer to complete and teachers cannot easily ensure that students are contributing equally to tasks. Finally, assessment and evaluation of outcomes may also be difficult at the end of the course in the Postactional Phase due to the aforementioned uncertainty about the veracity of students' work.

Furthermore, the lack of investment and involvement by students seen before the course could easily occur again once the course is finished, rendering it more challenging to plan with students for the future. This is especially pertinent in the context of pandemic-driven online teaching since there is uncertainty as to the need to teach again online in the future. Students and, for that matter, teachers may feel less motivated to expend time and energy adapting to the online context if it is only going to be temporary.

The Case Study

This case study came about as a result of a discussion course which had initially seemed to transition well from the physical classroom to the online space. The video and news article-based lessons appeared to make effective use of the various features of the Zoom application and the students reacted to them positively.

The students in the class were all second year undergraduates who I know well and had taught previously and it is fair to say that they were relatively comfortable studying with each other. The level of the students was B1 and B2 on the CEFR scale. These students had been typically attentive and enthusiastic in the past and they began the online semester with a similar positive approach.

However, towards the end of the semester, it became apparent that these

students were becoming fatigued with the repurposed classroom materials that I was using and the online experience in general. Discussion and engagement with the videos or reading texts was more limited than in earlier weeks and there was a growing tendency for students to use Japanese in breakout rooms. Framed in the terminology of Dillenbourg and Schneider's research (1995), working together had moved from *collaboration* to *cooperation* with some students resorting to independently generating answers to the discussion questions as opposed to discussing them together and engaging with the content more deeply.

Students who had been quieter (yet involved) before became noticeably silent in the main room and lessons began to drag. Since I knew the students well, I felt able to ask them why this was and they commented that they were tired and bored of online classes and overwhelmed with homework from other courses. They said that studying and answering discussion questions in front of a screen was tiring and that their motivation was lower than before.

It was partly hearing this that led me to see what would happen if I reframed my approach to the next lesson. Instead of attempting to continue to adapt the existing syllabus and materials to the online environment as I had been doing, I decided to use the online environment itself (in this case Zoom) as my starting point and to replace the subsequent lesson with something completely different.

Since there were few options available (and none I thought that were better) I decided to continue to use Zoom. I considered its features and limitations and examined my library of teaching materials with the aim of finding a class or activity that could be adapted to work best within its format. I eventually settled on using a version of the vocabulary game *Scattergories* for the

class in the hope that it would provide a more tailored and stimulating online experience for students.

The decision to write about the class was made afterwards when it became apparent that the change was an effective one and that I felt that it provoked some interesting questions about how to approach online teaching and learning.

Scattergories

Scattergories is a word game played in teams that is often used in English classes. Although it can be configured to involve grammatical elements, it is predominantly a vocabulary game used to review *existing* vocabulary（Yuliansyah and Syafei, 2018）. Though it is more often played with younger learners, it is not exclusively so and I have found it to be an engaging, productive and fun activity for students of all ages and levels. It can be particularly useful as respite in a heavyweight or exam-focused curriculum.

There are numerous variants of the game although the one I have typically used in regular classrooms with my students involves splitting the group into four or five teams. Five categories are selected（such as *animals, food and drink, countries, adjectives, sports and hobbies*）and then a letter is chosen for each round. Students have to come up with one example beginning with that letter for each category. For example, when given the letter *H*, a team might come up with *horse, hamburger, Hungary, huge* and *hockey*.

A time limit is given for each round and any categories in which a team has failed to think of an answer or failed to write one down score zero points. The most important aspect of the game, however, is that only unique answers score points. If two teams choose the same answer then each team

will score zero for that category. In the classroom game, students write down answers on a piece of paper but spelling is not usually checked. In my experience, cheating (though generally good-natured!), such as writing after the time is up or giving answers that have not been written down is relatively commonplace.

How the features of the Zoom Online Meeting Application are suitable for Scattergories and how they may be able to improve on the classroom version

In the traditional classroom version of the game with students in the same room, each team can hear what other teams are discussing, leading to teams communicating with each other in either whispered voices or, more commonly, just writing answer suggestions on their answer sheet. Where teams do speak to each other in normal, or even raised, voices this can result in some teams 'copying' answers they have heard other teams discuss out loud.

Zoom, on the other hand, provides a feature called 'Breakout Rooms'. These are private rooms away from the main room into which students can be separated into smaller groups. Since there were 8 students in this class, I decided to use the Breakout Rooms feature to automatically create 4 rooms, one for each team.

Using Breakout Rooms allows each team a private area in which to come up with their answers. Separating the students in this way seems to provide a more accessible environment (i.e. in front of fewer students) in which to complete tasks. This is particularly important for shy students who may need such a space to more freely share their ideas (Young 1991).

Using Breakout Rooms also removes any possibility of answer copying

from hearing other teams, either intentionally or inadvertently. Whilst putting students in separate rooms does increase the potential for cheating（using Google or a dictionary, for example）and students can still come up with answers after the rooms are closed, the more stringent time pressures online（mentioned subsequently）and students' knowledge and／or fear that a teacher can 'drop in' to any Breakout Room at any time do mitigate this to some extent.

In the classroom game, Japanese students who are unfamiliar with the game tend to take a long time to think of answers, at least in early rounds. In Japan, where consensus-building is an important societal norm（Hammond 2007）, even something as simple as choosing a team name can involve considerable discussion. However, since the host is able to both open and close the Breakout Rooms on Zoom, the teacher has more control over time-keeping and there are clearer time boundaries for students which necessitate thinking more quickly. Rooms can be closed by the teacher with students given a time interval of between 15 and 60 seconds to either leave the room themselves or be automatically returned to the main room for answer collection.

Further to this, using the Breakout Rooms allows for a new initiative to incentivise groups to come up with answers and return to the main room as quickly as possible. This is achieved through bonus and penalty points. The first team to leave the breakout room and return to the main room receives a bonus point, while the last team back receives a penalty point.

This represents one of the biggest changes compared to the classroom version and students were visibly enthused and motivated to complete the task in good time, to the point of asking *"Are we first?!"* or *"Are we last?!"* im-

mediately on their return to the main room（despite being able to see who is present in the room for themselves）. This resulted in a very high-paced and exciting game with more rounds being played and thus more vocabulary.

In the classroom, I have tried previously to check spelling but this has tended to severely interrupt the flow of the game and reduces the number of rounds that can be played. Certainly there is value in ensuring students have spelled words correctly but, given that they end up having done so in the vast majority of cases, I would argue that the benefits of checking spelling do not outweigh the downsides in the traditional classroom context. However, Zoom has a chat function which can be utilised to collate answers from students. Each team has a designated writer for each round who is responsible for typing the team's answer for each category into the chat box on the count of three. This allows for spelling to become a new, minimally invasive aspect of the game since students now have to write their answers as opposed to simply saying them.

Furthermore, since all the answers appear simultaneously, there is a considerable time saving compared with collecting answers individually from each team and students cannot cheat by waiting for another team's answer to copy. As a result, there is no need to alter the order of answer collection to prevent cheating and there is a clear and visible record of answers and duplicates, which makes scoring noticeably simpler and faster.

The ability of the meeting host to share his/her screen on Zoom streamlines the scoring and gives more time for actual gameplay. I elected to use a pre-prepared Excel spreadsheet with the teams on it, which is easier and neater than the traditional white or blackboard often found in Japanese classrooms. Through the use of basic formulas, the teacher can automatically

keep score for each team and the spreadsheet also allows for embellishments such as double point rounds and special rules to be made with minimal disruption or confusion.

Screen-sharing also provides a clean and visible space on which to record any changes to categories（allowing previously used letters to be used again）or for expansions to be made to the game, which can be listed as notes underneath the scoring table. It is these expansions that arguably make the game more interesting for students and allow them to be more creative so having a place to quickly record them helps students to remember them and incorporate them into the game. These might be things such as double points for a double-letter compound word, such as *soy sauce* as a food in the *S* round or double points for choosing an adjective with exactly 7 letters.

Seven of the eight students took part in the class using either desktop or laptop computers. The other student used a smart phone. Unlike in the traditional classroom, this means that all participants have access to the Internet to hand, enabling even further expansion of the game. One example of this was in later rounds where bonus points were introduced to the *Country* category. A bonus point was given for countries where the capital city began with the same letter as the country or was one letter either side. For example, a unique answer of *Sweden* would score two points since the capital city, *Stockholm,* also begins with S. *China* would also score two points since the capital city *Beijing* begins with B, which is next to C.

Since in many cases, students know the country name but not the capital city, this creates an exciting opportunity for autonomous learning and fulfilment in that students can look up the information for themselves in their in-

ternet browsers and report back to the group. To do the same in a traditional classroom would not only involve the risky decision to introduce smartphones into the classroom but also likely take a considerable amount of additional time.

Existing Limitations

Separating the students into separate Breakout Rooms does make it more difficult for the teacher to police any incidence of L1 speaking, although regular 'drop ins' to rooms can mitigate this to some extent. However, since this activity is predominantly a vocabulary review and generation activity and the answers are all given in English, students' use of Japanese does not in itself impede the achievement of the activity's primary objectives.

Equally, it is difficult to prevent students from using dictionaries or looking up answers on the Internet (although in this case students did not appear to be doing this). It is also true, however, that the relatively fast pace of the game and fast, simultaneous revealing of answers in the main room does make time-consuming cheating a pursuit that is likely to result in blank answers in other categories. Furthermore, although not in the spirit of the game it is not entirely a bad outcome for a student to introduce a new piece of vocabulary that they have found through such methods, since Scattergories is predominantly a vocabulary generation and review activity. Equally, policing cheating can be difficult in the Japanese context and it may be unwise for the teacher to take any actions that cause students to feel embarrassed in front of their peers. (Swan and Smith, 2001)

Whilst we were lucky in this case to avoid any connection issues, they can never be discounted in any online class. Since students in this case were in

teams of two, any connection issues would place a lot of pressure on the other team member to produce answers by themselves although, crucially, the team would still be able to participate with only one member.

Finally, it must be considered that many students simply do not enjoy studying online and the stress and fatigue that students had previously expressed about studying online will not magically disappear after one successful Zoom lesson. There are both tangible and intangible advantages to being physically present in the same room as one's peers and the social aspects, in particular the moments before and after a lesson which are so lacking in online classes, cannot be discounted.

Conclusion

Although the notion of teaching a class specifically with the Zoom platform and its features in mind was a considered one, the decision to write about the experience was conceived of after the event. Thus, there is unfortunately no detailed questionnaire data from students upon which to draw conclusions (although this would be a relatively simple study to conduct in future). Nevertheless, I would contend that there are clear signs of success and even measurable improvement over the classroom version.

Firstly, it was evident from students' mannerisms and body language how motivated they were and much they were enjoying the activity. This was also seen in students who had been shy in our other online classes playing a more active role both in Breakout Rooms and also in the main room. While having happy students alone does not indicate a successful classroom activity, it does at least demonstrate an alleviation of the motivation concerns expressed by students with regards their previous online classes.

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In particular, I noticed students in Breakout Rooms working together to think of answers and then achieving consensus as a pair before moving to the next category. In the classroom version it is more typical for students to divide categories amongst themselves and work independently or, perhaps most commonly, for the most confident person in the pair/group to be responsible for the majority of the answers while the others stay silent. For online learning in particular to be successful, achieving some degree of collaboration amongst learners is of paramount importance.

Secondly, the online game was also played at a much higher pace than the classroom variant. A typical game in the classroom would last an hour from start to finish and usually in this time, 7 to 10 rounds would be played. On Zoom we were able to play 19 rounds in 75 minutes. Furthermore, in a typical classroom game, it would be rare to be able to introduce more than one or two additional rules or bonus points. In this online version, six additional rules were able to be added.

This was not simply down to the technology alone, although this did play a part. More impressive, however, was that this higher pace seemed to devolve largely from the students' increased energy and excitement. After weeks of struggling with quite low levels of motivation, the magnitude and immediacy of this improvement was pronounced.

Further to this, there also appeared to be considerably more incidental English used than one would typically encounter with this activity, generally a feature of a class of motivated students. This incidental English comprised comments made about other teams' answers, expressions of emotion and questions for clarification. These occurred with much greater frequency than in the traditional classroom version of the class. Examples included ques-

tions such as *"Are we first back?"*, *"Who's writing? Me or you?"*, *"How do I open the Chat?" "Is Hong Kong a country?"*, comments such as *"Oh no! Same answer"*, *"I was going to choose…"*, *"Ah! Two L's!"*, *"No! The same again!"* or when students had a blank answer and couldn't type in the chat, *"Sorry, I have no idea"* or *"I couldn't think of one"*.

A large amount of this incidental English was collaborative in nature with students genuinely working together as opposed to simply dividing up tasks. Students asked each other questions and helped each other not only to come up with answers but also to navigate the Zoom platform. This allowed for me as the teacher to adopt a much more facilitative role. As a result, students were able to be much more autonomous and to take greater control over their own learning.

Finally, the enrichment of the game through additional rules and the addition of spelling, made possible by the more manageable online format, clearly added an interesting extra dimension. In particular, it allowed for the expansion of the activity beyond the game itself and, in turn, another opportunity for students to be more autonomous in their learning － researching facts such as capital cities on the Internet empowered students as information gatherers rather than simply recipients.

In terms of teaching policy, it would be perhaps overreaching to suggest that this simple Case Study can indicate anything more than the relative merits of an online as opposed to a traditional approach to a relatively innocuous classroom game, or even just a teacher's relief at having offered an enjoyable online experience to a group of fatigued students. Given the small scale of the study and lack of a robust research framework, such a contention would be hard to refute.

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Nevertheless, there are lessons that I would tentatively argue can be learned from this experience and these are such that they are likely to have a considerable impact on the way that I plan to teach classes online for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic (and in any online teaching beyond).

That is to say that the oft-repeated utterances about online teaching stated in the introduction of *"damage limitation"* or *"doing one's best"* seem to pre-suppose an outcome that is necessarily inferior to what could have been achieved in a traditional classroom, which invariably involves trying to ascertain how to teach an existing syllabus or traditional classroom materials online.

Whilst this approach may often be unavoidable, what I hope to be able to explore with the remainder of my online teaching is the extent to which features of the online classroom can be taken *as a starting point* rather than simply a method of delivery. In other words, I would like to move away from the idea of *"How can I teach X online?"* towards *"What does the online environment best enable me to teach?"*

In doing so, it is crucial to consider not only whether lessons will practically work in an online context but also whether they will provide the opportunities for collaboration and autonomous learning that online students seem to need in order to stay motivated and achieve their goals.

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