

Inter Faculty, 11 (2021): 261–267

<https://journal.hass.tsukuba.ac.jp/interfaculty/article/view/179>

Published: March 27, 2022

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Tingjie XU

Oita Prefectural College of Arts and Culture (Japan)

To cite this article:

XU, T. (2021). A Comparative Study of Blended Learning and Face-to-Face Instruction in University-Level Chinese Language Education. *Inter Faculty*, Vol. 11, pp.261–267. <<https://journal.hass.tsukuba.ac.jp/interfaculty/article/view/179>> [Accessed: 2022.3.28]



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A Comparative Study of Blended Learning and Face-to-Face Instruction in University-Level Chinese Language Education

Tingjie XU

Oita Prefectural College of Arts and Culture (Japan)

Abstract

This study examines university-level Chinese language education by comparing blended learning courses, which combine on-demand video-based classes and face-to-face Zoom classes, with conventional face-to-face courses. The data was drawn from the final exam grades and course evaluation questionnaires for the 2018-2020 academic years. The study resulted in two main conclusions: 1) In the case of grades, the blended learning classes, which were held remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were as effective in achieving their learning goals as the regular face-to-face classes; 2) With regard to course evaluations, the scores of the two questions asked, (i.e. 'ways to attract student attention' and 'methods of presenting teaching materials') were lower for the blended learning courses than for the 2018 and 2019 face-to-face courses. Therefore, it is clear that these two aspects must be prioritized in the future.

Keywords: university-level Chinese language education, blended learning, face-to-face learning, grades, class evaluation questionnaire

要旨

本稿では、大学の初修中国語教育におけるブレンド型授業（2020年度、動画によるオンデマンド型授業とZoomによる対面授業をブレンドしたもの）について、従来の対面授業（2018・2019年度）の成績や授業評価アンケートの結果との比較分析を行った。分析の結果、1）成績の観点ではコロナ禍で遠隔で行われた今回のブレンド授業でも、通常の対面授業と同程度の学習効果を得られることが明らかになった。2）授業評価アンケートの結果では「学生の関心をひきつける工夫」と「教材提示の方法」という2項目の得点が対面授業の2018・2019年度のいずれよりも低い評価得点となっている。このことから、今後この2項目について優先的・重点的に考えていく必要があることが明らかになった。

キーワード：大学の初修中国語教育、ブレンド型授業、対面授業、成績、授業評価アンケート

1. Introduction

Lately, there have been considerable efforts to use information and communication technology in Chinese language instruction. Among these, blended learning, combining regular face-to-face learning and e-learning, has attracted much attention (Zhao et al. 2012: 49-50). This study examines the efficacy of blended learning courses used for university-level Chinese language instruction in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and compares them with the results of traditional face-to-face courses taught in 2018 and 2019, using the final exam grades and course evaluation questionnaires as the basis. The purpose of this study is to assess both the success level and challenges of blended learning in order to improve blended learning methodologies used in Chinese language instruction in the future.

2. Previous research

Li (2014: 15) outlines three categories of blended learning, which differ in the form of classroom instruction. Type 1 is ‘out-of-class blended learning’ and involves a blend of face-to-face learning in the classroom and remote e-learning. Type 2, ‘blended learning type within a single class framework’, is a combination of individual learning using web-based training materials and paired dialogue samples, along with instruction by the professor in a single unit class. Finally, Type 3 is ‘independent alternating blended learning’, in which e-learning is replaced with face-to-face instruction in the classroom. The effectiveness of blended learning in university-level Chinese language education in Japan has also been studied by Zhao et al. (2012; 2013) and Hong and Fujimoto (2012), who explored the Type 1 ‘out-of-class blended learning’. The methodologies that Zhao et al. (2012; 2013) and Hong and Fujimoto (2012) employ follow a three-step process: 1) new learning in face-to-face classes, 2) e-learning outside the classroom, and 3) confirming that the material presented remotely was learned by applying it in the next face-to-face class.

The studies mentioned above offer useful ideas on how to introduce blended learning in Chinese language education. However, if only the university level of Chinese education is considered, one can see that while there are studies on the Type 1 instruction by Zhao et al. (2012; 2013) and Hong and Fujimoto (2012), no studies have been conducted on Types 2 or 3. However, as Fujishiro and Miyaji (2009: 395-396) state, there is no standard way to ensure the best type of instruction; therefore, we must consider effective combinations that will respond to the learning needs of different students and reflect the nature of the subject matter. Moreover, to further develop blended learning in Chinese language education at university-level, it is important to continue Type 1 instruction while introducing new practices for Types 2 and 3. This study examines Type 3 ‘independent alternating blended learning’. In this format, the acquisition of the basic language knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar, which is usually learned in face-to-face classes, is replaced by on-demand video-based lessons. The first session is followed by two sessions of face-to-face Zoom-based classes that test the students’ knowledge acquired through exams and quizzes, along with various learning activities that promote the retention and application of new knowledge.

3. Outline of the class

In the second semester of the 2020 academic year, I held a blended-learning course of Chinese IB, a primary language course, that met once per week. It was a continuation of Chinese IA, which was offered the previous semester. Between sixty and one hundred students take Chinese IB each year. The students are split into two classes, and the instructor teaches the same content to each group of students, based on Classes 4–8 of the *Chugokugo hajime no ippo* (First Steps in Chinese) (Hakusuisha 2012) textbook. In the first lesson, the students were required to watch an hour-long video prepared by the instructor which discussed the vocabulary, elements of conversation, grammar, and exercises to be learned in that class, and subsequently, the students were required to submit their assignments by a given deadline. The second and third classes were face-to-face classes on Zoom, which focused on the following: 1) activities to ensure that the students were retaining the basic knowledge of Chinese learned through the videos (through feedback on assignments, the dictation of words, by checking the pronunciation of words, and the ability to conduct basic conversations, and

conversation practice in pairs); 2) activities intended to apply the knowledge acquired in practice, such as the ability to express oneself using basic knowledge, and other tasks (conversation practice in pairs, presentation of essays in groups). In addition, I actively used Zoom's features, such as breakout rooms, to increase the level of student participation in class.

4. Results

The final exam was held in a university classroom for all the three years spanning 2018 to 2020. The textbooks used in the face-to-face and blended learning classes were the same, and the final exams had the same format and content. A one-factor analysis of variance for the final exam performance for each year (2018: $m = 85.6$, $n = 87$, $SD = 10.59$; 2019: $m = 82.6$, $n = 55$, $SD = 10.23$; 2020: $m = 85.3$, $n = 62$, $SD = 10.97$) revealed no significant differences between those years ($F(2,201) = 1.39$, ns). This indicates that the blended learning format used remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the same level of learning as the regular face-to-face courses.

The course evaluation questionnaire included three categories, namely, 'lesson content', 'methods of teaching' and 'students' own efforts'¹ with five questions in each category, all rated on a five-point scale. The questionnaire was administered at the fifteenth-class session for both the face-to-face and blended learning courses. To identify the differences across the three years, a one-factor analysis of variance was conducted on the assessment scores for each item. Multiple comparisons were made with Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test for those items where significant differences were identified (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of Course Evaluation Questionnaires

Item	2018 n = 68 M(SD)	2019 n = 46 M(SD)	2020 n = 62 M(SD)	One-factor analysis of variance through multiple comparisons by HSD test
1. The content of the class was sufficiently understandable.	4.63 (0.51)	4.74 (0.49)	4.55 (0.50)	ns
2. The content of the class was interesting.	4.60 (0.55)	4.78 (0.41)	4.48 (0.69)	F (2,173) = 3.54, p<.05 2019 > 2020 , p <.05
3. I gained knowledge and skills through the class.	4.66 (0.47)	4.76 (0.47)	4.65 (0.54)	ns
4. The contents of the class were useful for me.	4.68 (0.50)	4.80 (0.45)	4.69 (0.53)	ns
5. The content of the class was satisfactory overall.	4.74 (0.47)	4.80 (0.45)	4.65 (0.51)	ns
6. The teacher's explanation was polite and easy to understand.	4.85 (0.35)	4.93 (0.25)	4.73 (0.48)	F (2,173) = 4.09, p<.05 2019 > 2020 , p <.05
7. The teacher's voice was clear and easy to understand.	4.87 (0.38)	4.87 (0.34)	4.77 (0.42)	ns
8. The teacher had a way to attract student attention.	4.72 (0.51)	4.78 (0.41)	4.39 (0.66)	F (2,173) = 8.72, p<.01 2018 > 2020 , p <.05 2019 > 2020 , p <.05
9. The teacher was trying to encourage students to ask questions and speak up.	4.81 (0.46)	4.87 (0.34)	4.65 (0.48)	F (2,173) = 3.88, p<.05 2019 > 2020 , p <.05
10. The way of presenting the teaching materials was appropriate and easy to understand.	4.81 (0.39)	4.87 (0.34)	4.63 (0.48)	F (2,173) = 5.09, p<.01 2018 > 2020 , p <.05 2019 > 2020 , p <.05

Table 1 shows that in the category of ‘lesson content’, item 2 had a significantly lower score in the blended learning course than in the face-to-face course in 2019. In the category of ‘methods of teaching’, items 6 and 9 had lower scores in the blended learning than in face-to-face learning in 2019, and items 8 and 10 showed lower evaluation scores than those from the face-to-face courses taught in 2018 and 2019. Therefore, it is clear that there were challenges concerning how to increase student satisfaction both with the lesson content and teaching methods in the ‘independent alternating blended learning type’ course that combined face-to-face and video instruction, held remotely on Zoom. Particularly, items 8

and 10 showed lower evaluation scores than those from the face-to-face courses taught in 2018 and 2019, underlying the importance of prioritizing the methods of how instructors can attract student attention and present materials in an accessible way in such courses in the future.

5. Conclusions

This study examines university-level Chinese language education by comparing blended learning courses, which combine on-demand video-based classes and face-to-face Zoom classes, with conventional face-to-face courses. The data was drawn from the 2018-2020 academic years final exam grades and course evaluation questionnaires. The study revealed two main conclusions: 1) in terms of grades, the blended learning classes, which were held remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, were as effective in their learning outcomes as the regular face-to-face classes; 2) regarding the course evaluations, the scores on the two questions ('ways to attract student attention' and 'methods of presenting teaching materials') were lower for the blended learning courses than for the face-to-face courses in 2018 and 2019. Therefore, it is clear that these two aspects must be prioritized in the future.

¹ 'Students' own efforts' is not included in this analysis.

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