

My Journey with Teaching Online versus Face-to-Face at Two Universities

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While teaching full-time at Shokei University and part-time at Kumamoto University throughout the 2020 academic year, I taught both face-to-face classes and online. Each university had a different Learning Management System (LMS), such as Google Classroom or Moodle, and different requirements for their online classes, including rules about showing one's face and which online video streaming provider was to be used, such as Google Meet or Zoom. As with many other educators, I had never used online video streaming services before, so the transition was a bumpy one at first.

Kumamoto University has been using Moodle exclusively for many years, so it was the only LMS available, and the university chose Zoom for online lessons. Meanwhile, Shokei University bought a Google Classroom license for all departments, and Google Meet was used for online lessons. After face-to-face classes began in June, teachers were requested to either provide an online synchronous option, upload a recorded version of their face-to-face lesson to Google Classroom post-class, or upload necessary materials and assignments to Google Classroom for students who couldn't (or didn't want to) come to face-to-face classes.

Objectives

- To compare Google Classroom and Moodle, and Google Meet and Zoom, and discuss which LMS and video streaming provider are the better choices from the perspective of a first-time user.
- To explain how, throughout the course of the academic year, my views on the use of technology in the classroom became more positive due to the necessity of online lessons.

Practical Implications

Comparing the LMSs I was required to use, I found Google Classroom to be the easier of the two to learn. It has an easy-to-use interface, and its simple features do not overwhelm new users, whether students or instructors. Online lessons with Google

Meet are easy to start with a few mouse clicks from the user's Google Classroom class list. Additionally, homework is easy to assign, grade, and return to students.

Compared with Google Classroom, I felt the learning curve was steeper for Moodle. It is very much text-based with extraordinarily few graphics, and it can be quite difficult for a beginner user to know what to do at first and how to go about doing different tasks. Writing simple announcements and uploading files are relatively easy, but the sheer number of options available when trying to assign homework can be overwhelming. Beginners will likely feel frustration while advanced users may enjoy the wide range of choices available. From my own experience as a first time user, Google Classroom is my clear preference.

Both online video streaming services that I used have very clear video, easy-to-use chat functions, and the ability to share one's own screen. There are, however, a few key differences between the two. Firstly, Zoom has more options, including the "breakout rooms" feature, which is hugely popular with users since it allows for easy pair or group work. There are also a large number of options available to help hosts customize their meetings. However, these options can overwhelm beginner users, so there is a learning curve to figure out where and how to change one's settings. Also, sessions on Zoom are only free for up to 40 minutes, which is not ideal for educators who have classes longer than that and do not have access to a paid account. This time limit can be worked around by ending the meeting and re-starting it, but some might find this tedious or unprofessional. In comparison with Zoom, Google Meet has fewer options overall, but I believe is simpler to use for those who only need to lecture or record their classes to upload later for students to watch.

Although both platforms have positive points, I feel Zoom has a slight overall advantage with its genius invention of breakout rooms. This feature is helpful not only to language educators, but also to

hosts of any type of group meeting as it allows participants to brainstorm ideas and discuss topics in a more intimate setting.

Reflective Conclusion

Since starting my university teaching career 15 years ago, I have almost exclusively used textbooks for my classes. Although I consider myself very computer-literate, before this academic year I had never used any online LMS or video streaming service, mainly because I had never felt a pressing need to do so. Until the past year, I had been able to give detailed written feedback for homework assignments by paper and pen, which had suited my teaching style. However, the necessity of doing online classes had a lot of unexpected surprises for me.

First, my part-time classes at Kumamoto University, which were all done completely online, showed higher attendance rates and homework completion rates, both at almost 100%, than I had ever previously experienced in any of my face-to-face classes. At my full-time position at Shokei University, I found that having an online option available, even when doing regular face-to-face classes, can be extremely valuable, as long as it does not put any extra unnecessary burden or stress on the instructor. For example, I used my iPad to stream my face-to-face classes for students who were sick at home, or could not physically come to school due to the heavy rain the Kumamoto area experienced last July, which in turn caused train lines to run irregularly or stop altogether. I was happy to see motivation on the part of students to join my classes even when they could not be physically present, and likewise the students seemed grateful that I could accommodate their requests to do classes online so they would not fall behind in their studies.

Starting this past spring, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced teachers across Japan to adapt to new ways of teaching. Although many thought this was a temporary situation, a large number of universities have already announced their intention to stay online heading into the beginning of the 2021 academic year. In addition, although a small number of tech-savvy instructors made the transition to emergency remote teaching quite easily, the majority of instructors, especially part-timers and including myself, had many troubles trying to navigate what to do. I hope this article, which compared two LMSs

and two online video tools, can help fellow teachers make their online classes more enjoyable and their own lives more stress-free.

About the Author

Josh Norman graduated from Kumamoto University with his PhD in 2006 and has been in Japan since 1997. He is currently teaching in the Department of Culture and Language at Shokei University in Kumamoto, Japan. His research interests include L1 use in the L2 classroom, *waseieigo*, and bilingualism.

Link to presentation on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wmrw-QNeAic>

