

# Blended Learning of Japanese between Tokyo and Taipei

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Currently, various computer/Internet technologies are being utilized to impart education. However, there remain many unresolved issues pertaining to their use. In particular, it is difficult for teachers and learners with different mother tongues to teach or learn the basics of a foreign language through e-learning.

In this study, Japanese teachers in Tokyo taught basic Japanese to Taiwanese learners in Taipei through blended learning. Learners accessed the self-study content on the Internet, and the teachers incorporated 'Moodle' for the course management. A weekly virtual lesson was also organized through a TV-Net meeting system between Taipei and Tokyo. In this paper, we will demonstrate how these courses were managed and on the basis of the evaluation questionnaire that the learners filled out, we will gauge the extent to which the learners enjoy the classes and the level of stress they experience. We will also discuss the future opportunities for language education through computer and Internet technologies.

## 1. Purpose of the project

Currently, various computer/Internet technologies are utilized to enable people to learn Japanese. However, only a few forms offer a comprehensive e-learning Japanese course.

The Taiwanese have numerous opportunities to study the Japanese language. Most universities in Taiwan have a department dedicated to the Japanese language and/or Japanese studies. There are many Japanese-medium schools in major cities. Therefore, in general, Japanese language learners in Taiwan need not have to take the recourse of distance learning. This project aims to explore the possibilities of blended learning. Herein, we have attempted to create a comprehensive blended Japanese learning course.

## 2. Course outline

This project attempts to teach elementary Japanese to novices, and enable them to reach the same level as students in the 4th grade of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test—the official test of the Japanese language. The 4th grade generally requires over 150 hours of learning.

The participants were five university learners who were living in Taipei. We conducted this course from September to December, 2006.

## 3. Details of Blended Learning

Blended learning is the combination of multiple approaches to learning. It can be imparted through the "blending" of virtual and physical resources.

Examples include combinations of technology-based materials, face-to-face sessions, and printed materials.

In this course, the combined approach for blended learning involved a multimedia-supported e-Learning module, controlled by a course management system (CMS). This module system was called "Moodle."

Therefore, even though "Moodle" was based at Tokyo Metropolitan University (TMU), the video and sound files were stored at both the Taipei Municipal University of Education (TMUE) and TMU in order to avoid problems arising from long access time, wastage of time, and irritation to learners. In this manner, all files were accessible from the learners' preferred location.

Further, all learners were able to access the internet from both their universities and homes.

Face-to-face sessions through video conferencing using an IP-based network were used to teach how to communicate and pronounce, which is difficult to accomplish by self-learning. We had 16 weekly lessons over 3 months. Each lesson lasted for 90 minutes, during which we explained sentence patterns in Japanese and vocabulary in Chinese. Subsequently, we performed oral drills and communicative practices in Japanese.

Herein, we did not control the self study of learners; however, in the absence of any supervision, not all learners would diligently study contents on the web. Therefore, the

instructor prepared unit tests after the face-to-face sessions. Learners studied for the unit test through Moodle and then sent the answers by e-mail to the instructor.

#### 4. Key inquiry of this course

Non-verbal communication is usually a helpful and direct method used in teaching. Sometimes in e-learning (i.e., face-to-face sessions), learners are unable to make contact through non-verbal communication. This is especially true in the case of teachers and learners who cannot make eye contact via an internet meeting system (Morikawa et al 2001, Sakai et al 2003).

In the case wherein a teacher's language differs from the learner's, it is difficult for both to communicate verbally and non-verbally, owing to the language barrier. Moreover, it is challenging for a teacher to provide support to the learner in the classroom through non-verbal communication, emails, forums, or discussion boards.

#### 5. Access log to study contents

Table 1 shows the access logs for all learners. Learner 5T accessed course content more frequently than did the other learners. We hypothesized that her access results might affect other results. Therefore, I added up the access results and excluded the results of her access log.

Table 1. Access logs for each learner

learner	s	number of	note
	e	accesses to	
	x	study contents	
1Y	m	253	a postgraduate learner, he likes Japanese animation
2H	f	334	a university learner
3C	f	332	a university learner, holder of the 4th grade of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test.
4O	f	261	a university student
5T	f	1071	a university student, she loves Japanese singers.

The left side, A, provides a count of all learners' access patterns. The right side, B, shows the results for four learners except 5T. In both A and B, the contents that comprise only the English version are lower. These are "New word," "Grammatical Notes," "Useful Daily Expression," and "Sound System of the Japanese language."

A learner commented on the questionnaire that "When I looked at the site and saw that it was full of English, I was afraid."

In some Asian countries, many teachers and learners are not proficient in English. Moreover, it is difficult for a learner to study another language in a language that is not their mother tongue.

Table 2. Access logs for all learners

	A: All learners		B: Four learners except 5T	
1	257	Unit Test	222	Unit Test
2	245	PDF Text	103	PDF Text
3	134	Virtual Lesson	51	Intro Quiz
4	103	Video Quiz	43	Video Quiz
5	79	Dialogue	41	Virtual Lesson
6	77	Intro quiz	40	Dialogue
7	66	PPT	32	Drill
8	64	Drill	30	Writing System of Japanese
9	44	Writing System of Japanese	24	PPT
10	31	New Word	20	New Word
11	27	Grammatical Notes	15	Grammatical Notes
12	19	Sound System of Japanese	11	Useful Daily Expression
13	18	Useful Daily Expression	9	Sound System of Japanese
14	17	Kana Sound quiz	4	Kana Sound quiz
15	2	Te-form		

Another noteworthy point is that certain learners accessed a forum board, which we did not use in this course. If we can effectively utilize such a forum function to teach learners and give assignments, the learners may learn the course content more effectively.

Therefore, when learning a language, it is necessary to bring learners and teachers together, especially at the beginner's level.

#### 6. Consideration

In this course, the instructor did not instruct the learners to study the entire course content. Instead, the instructor entrusted the learners with the responsibility of studying the course content. As a result, the access logs were different for each learner.

Fung reported that the lack of time and the learners' preference for spending time on online learning formed the most significant barriers (Fung 2004), also showing that some learners did

not thoroughly study in the self-study material in this course.

However, one learner who did not fully access the contents performed well in the face-to-face sessions. Moreover, he sent post cards to the instructor when he was traveling. Such learners cannot be expected to study on the web by himself; however, he may extract some learning value through direct contact with a native Japanese teacher.

Learner 5T actively accessed the contents. However, she hesitated in face-to-face sessions, was unable to answer fluently, and would ultimately stop answering. It appeared that she was shy by nature and afraid of making mistakes. However, she was highly motivated and loved Japanese pop culture. I consider that self-study contents are helpful to learners like her.

### 7. Requirement of teaching assistants (TAs)

In this course, a Taiwanese teaching assistant (TA) assisted the Japanese instructor in the face-to-face sessions. Currently, there are many international learners studying in Japanese universities. With their support, we may be able to effectively conduct e-learning classes even when teachers and learners do not share a common mother tongue.

This would constitute an unprecedented dynamic activity, and we may be able to provide learners with a unique learning opportunity.

For example, native Japanese teachers in Japan might cooperate with non-native Japanese teachers in other countries to administer such courses.



Fig.1. Face-to-face session

### 8. Next subject

E-learning classes could be an effective method of learning, even when teachers and learners do not share a common mother tongue.

Regretfully, in this course, we did not conduct an achievement test to assess learners' learning. For that reason, we cannot make objective conclusions. However, we will conduct a course similar to this one in the near future. At that time, we will also administer an achievement test. We will subsequently consider the access logs, questionnaire responses, and test results, and I will evaluate the course more objectively.

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