

Investigating students' attendance in face-to-face, online, and blended teaching of the Japanese language

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Abstract

This study aims to compare which mode of teaching delivery has the highest attendance rate among face-to-face, Emergency Remote Teaching, hybrid, and online-only courses using two different British universities between 2017 and 2022 for a five-year duration. Two types of investigations were undertaken for both universities, but not necessarily simultaneously every year. The data collection comprised two components, attendance register and students' Module Evaluation Questionnaire comments. Mixed methods were used. The total participants of this study were 316 students who studied the Japanese language, the majority of whom were between 18 and 21 years old. Their results show that the order of high attendance rate was Emergency Remote Teaching, followed by face-to-face teaching, online teaching, and hybrid teaching.

Keywords: Asynchronous online teaching; attendance; emergency remote teaching; higher education; language learning; synchronous online teaching.

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1. Introduction

Students' attendance at lectures at universities appears to be a worldwide issue in any subject. Attendance at higher education usually concerns the following three parties: university, teachers, and students. From a university's perspective, attendance is a measure of integration into academic life. From a teacher's perspective, attendance is an indicator of academic performance (Bowen et al., 2005) and students' engagement and success (Brocato, 1989; Jones, 1984; Launius, 1997; Moore, 2003; Romer, 1993; White, 1992; Wiley, 1992). From a student's perspective, they may attend classes from a sense of obligation, habit, value for money, university experience, a sense of scholarly community of learners, students' social life, enjoyment, and discipline for learning (Gysbers et al., 2011). Good discipline means maintaining a structured study schedule and study habits while the scholarly community environment provides group dynamics and modeling experience by expert practitioners to improve their performance (Gysbers et al., 2011).

The study of students' attendance is an interdisciplinary subject. Various disciplines (e.g., medicine, accounting, nursing, business school, economics, psychology) have been investigated to understand students' attendance patterns, reasons for absence, and students' performance asynchronous learning, among others. This study investigates students' attendance in a language education context, where attendance is also an integral part of learning. In language, attending classes provides opportunities to interact with the instructors who may be a native language speaker, to interact with peers in the target language, and to ask questions. Interacting with the instructor and peers may also contribute to the feeling that attending classes is enjoyable and stimulating (Li, 2022). Spending an hour speaking the language contributes to maximizing students' speaking and listening skills. Thus, consistent attendance in language classes contributes to the enhancement of language performance. If students view themselves as capable of accomplishing to speak languages, they will more likely attempt to and put in more effort to attend classes regularly. However, students prefer the option of learning online. This leads to other benefits such as students' self-confidence, task persistence, motivation, effort, and self-regulated learning (Lewohl, 2023). Yet, students' low attendance in language classrooms concerns language tutors.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed human behavior in a short period. Not only has it stopped people's movement between countries and had an impact on the economy and business, but has also affected education. After COVID-19, two types of online teaching have been identified and distinguished: one is 'emergency' and the other is 'quality' (DeCoito & Estaityeh 2022). "Emergency remote teaching (ERT)" has emerged as a common alternative term used by online education researchers and professional practitioners to draw a clear contrast with what many of us know as high-quality online education (Hodges et al., 2020; Algouzi & Hazaea 2023).

Investigation into ERT began shortly after COVID-19 started in 2020. ERT is a temporary teaching solution to an emergent problem whereas well-planned online learning requires time and process where careful instructional design and development to create an effective learning environment (Ergulec, 2019; Palloff and Pratt, 2013). An example of well-planned online learning education may be traditional distance learning education, serving adult and mature students who are notably older and bear more familial, financial, and work-related responsibilities compared to on-campus students (Jung and Rhea, 2000; Hussein et al., 2020a; Chen, 2023).

Online learning has three formats: synchronous, asynchronous, and blended (Fadde and Vu, 2014). The earliest reference to the term 'blended learning' is from the late 1990s (Friesen 2012). Asynchronous format gives more flexibility to students than face-to-face. It relies on students' self-control over the pace and the environment in which they learn. This format is not only supports students who are unable to attend but also those who are focused, motivated, self-disciplined learners. Adult learners require more flexibility and asynchronous is usually best perhaps with optional synchronous sessions while younger learners benefit from the structure of required synchronous sessions (Hodges et al., 2020). The blended format usually combines the synchronous

main face-to-face part with the asynchronous as a supplement. Studies on asynchronous recorded lectures have commenced from around 1996 and have increased greatly around 2001 (Gosper et al., 2010).

Synchronous online teaching offers more autonomy than face-to-face, which may be a strength. With face-to-face, students can have a choice either to attend or not, synchronous online teaching also resulted in changing students' preferences and behaviors from the face-to-face format of teaching due to the variety of options they are offered. For example, attendance of synchronous online teaching still gives students options to attend the class with the following three options: camera on or off; and/or with or without sound; and/or use of keyboard tool. With the keyboard tool, students are also able to attend with 'camera off and sound off' but can participate only keyboard.

Synchronous online teaching may also support students with mental health issues. According to Hollister et al.'s (2022) study, more than half (64%) have never or hardly kept their camera on, about 30% sometimes and 6% keep their camera always on. Furthermore, synchronous online teaching supports learning when learners are physically unable to attend the class due to logistics (too early, too crowded, too much distraction) and pedagogical (too difficult) reasons (Gysbers et al., 2011).

The weakness of synchronous online teaching may be reliance on Wi-Fi. Zoom and Microsoft Teams are closer than to face-to-face environments but require reliable technology and technology know-how to allow for more real-time engagement and assessment (Ghanbari & Nowroozi 2021). Another weakness is that online learning is often considered inferior to face-to-face learning despite evidence to the contrary (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). It is claimed that only a minority of students prefer online to lectures as they allow them to work at their own pace, convenience, and distraction from peers (Gysbers et al., 2011) and that the majority of students prefer the face-to-face mode of instruction (Hussein et al., 2020b; Gysbers et al., 2021).

The strength of asynchronous online teaching may be its usefulness for revising difficult concepts through repetition at a user-controlled pace as this is impossible with face-to-face only delivery teaching mode. However, again, the logistics is one reason for the lack of face-to-face attendance (Gysbers et al., 2011), unreliable Wi-Fi became one of the common reasons for students' absence.

1.1. Purpose of study

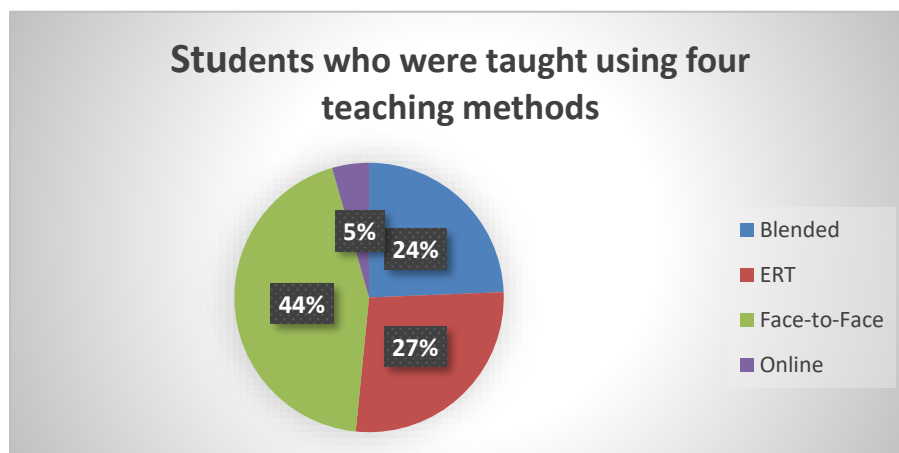
The objective of this study is to compare which mode of teaching delivery has the highest attendance rate among face-to-face, ERT, hybrid, and online-only courses. Differentiating ERT and online quality/well-planned teaching, this study compares the attendance rate of all four types, i.e., face-to-face, ERT, quality/well-planned online teaching, and hybrid. It also investigates students' comments from online-only courses. It is hypothesized that the highest attendance rate is face-to-face, taking into consideration the students' preference for the university experience. This is followed by hybrid, as hybrid includes face-to-face, then, ERT as students understand this is a temporary form of teaching. Online is the last of the four as this format allows students' autonomy.

2. Methods and materials

This study used mixed methods providing quantitative attendance rates and qualitative student feedback. The duration of this study was five years between 2017/18 and 2021/22. Students were taught using four teaching delivery methods (Figure 1). The study involved two different British universities (Universities 1 and 2).

Figure 1

Breakdown of student's percentage who were taught Blended, ERT, Face-to-face, and online-only



2.1. Data collection tools

2.1.1. Course Description: University 1

Language classes are usually taught in small class sizes (less than 18 students). The modules selected for analysis were the first, the second, and the third-year modules in Japanese at a British university. These were elective modules offered in the undergraduate IWLP program in the School of Media, Arts, and Humanities at University 1.

There are three levels of Japanese: Japanese Ab Initio, Japanese Intermediate, and Japanese Advanced which were taught over a standard 11 teaching weeks. Classes comprised of seminars and classes. Students must complete it before moving to the next level. The findings reported in this paper relate to attendance at 12 x two-hour seminars and 12 x two-hour classes. The students are required to submit two coursework (amounting to 50% of their overall grade) and sit a two-hour summative examination (amounting to 50% of their overall grade). Two tutors were involved with teaching all modules in 2021/22, four tutors in 2020/21, two tutors in 2019/20 and 2018/19, and three tutors in 2017/18.

The data for this study includes both ERT and online learning both of which used Zoom. In the Spring term in early March 2021, all classes became fully online for self-isolation at University 1. The synchrony of this study depends on the tutors but was with either synchronous Zoom or a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous (recorded teaching material using Panopto, quizzes, etc). Student-instructor ratio was below 20 students to 1 instructor.

From the Autumn term of 2021 to the Spring term of 2022, all classes were blended with face-to-face and online. The mode of teaching delivery differs by year depending on the degree of blended (over 50% online) and blended (25–50% online). Students experienced a mixture of lecture (listening) and collaboration with peers. The synchrony of this term was a mixture of synchronous Zoom and asynchronous (recorded teaching material using Panopto, quizzes, etc.). Student-instructor ratio was below 15 students to 1 instructor. The researcher involved teaching as a tutor to one cohort of 1st-year classes and one cohort of 2nd-year students as a part of the team teaching in 2019/20 and 2020/21 and 2021/22. In 2017/18 and 2018/19 (face-to-face), the researcher was involved in teaching all cohorts of 1st and 2nd year students as a tutor.

During the five-year study period (2017–2022), two academic years 2020/21 and 2021/22 were ERT and online. Some online courses in 2020/21 and all online courses in 2021/22 provided asynchronous Panopto recording in addition to synchronous Zoom teaching.

Attendance of all levels of Japanese modules is not compulsory. Students were not given any credit for class attendance to their grades. The University has no attendance policy but a variety of attendance policies and practices exist within different departments. Although class attendance is recorded in every class, students do not require their attendance to complete the modules.

2.1.2. Course description: University 2

This course was the only online Japanese course (absolute beginners) offered at a British university to a worldwide audience and the majority of students were mature students.

The Japanese course was taught once a week over a standard 10 teaching weeks for two terms (a total of 20 weeks). The findings in this paper relate to attendance at 10 x one-hour asynchronous Panopto recordings and 10 x one-hour synchronous teaching using Microsoft Teams. The students were required to do one coursework submission each term (amounting to 100% of their overall grade). The tutor was the researcher who taught in 2021/22. Student-instructor ratio was below 10 students to 1 instructor.

This course was not ERT as the tutor who was also a researcher of this study had one year of online Zoom teaching experience before teaching at university 2. This course was also well prepared with teaching quality assurance approved by the University 2 – The tutor took three months to design and plan the main synchronous and supplementary asynchronous lecture recordings for this course. Completed 20 x one-hour asynchronous lecture recordings using Panopto were submitted to the Director of Studies in Language and Cultural Studies at University 2 for their approval by University 2 one month before the main one-hour synchronous teaching for 20 weeks. After submitting the Panopto recording, the Director of Studies at University 2 checked the content of the lecture recordings and advised the tutor to make new Panopto lecture recordings based on the advice given by the Director of Studies at University 2, which the tutor did. Synchronous teaching was also checked and approved by the Director of Studies at University 2 by class visit.

The data collection comprised two components, attendance register and students' MEQ comments.

2.1.3. Attendance rate

Attendance in each seminar and class was monitored by manual head count of students in the registers for university 1 and 2. Both university's registers were administered at different times of the day and days of the week. The attendance rate for face-to-face, ERT, and hybrid was collected from University 1. The attendance rate for online-only courses was administered at the same time of the day and days of the week and collected from university 2.

2.1.4. Students' comments

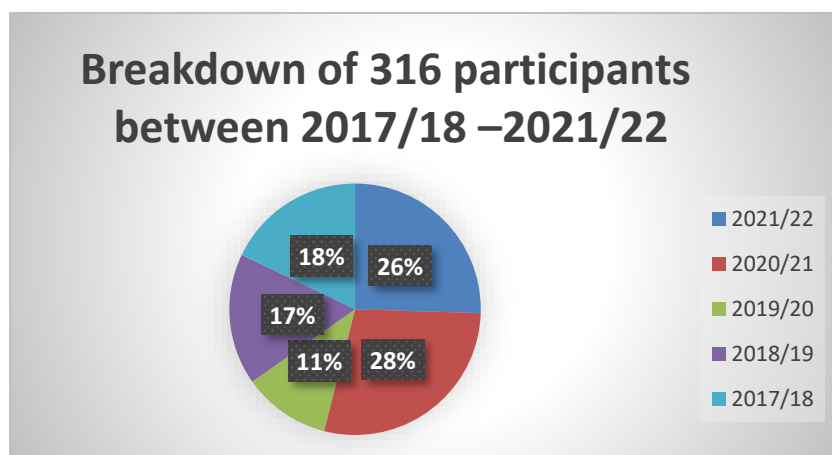
In University 2, students were invited to submit University 2's MEQ out of their class hours at the end of the course (April 2022). This MEQ was not compulsory and anonymous. The University 2's MEQ collected information on their lecturers' teaching, assessment, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) using a 4 4-point Likert scale and general comments about the lecture in a free-response section. The general comments are used for this study.

2.2. Participants

Participants consisted of two cohorts from two different British universities. The total participants of this study were 316 students (136 male, 180 female) who were selected through convenience sampling. The total number consisted of University 1 (302 participants) and University 2 (14 participants) students. The breakdown of 316 students is 77 students (2021/22), 86 students (2020/21), 34 students (2019/20), 51 students (2018/19) and 54 students (2017/18). Figure 2 below summarizes the ratio of each academic year:

Figure 2

Breakdown percentage of 316 participants between 2017/18/ and 2021/22



The literature indicated that a certain group of students such as mature students and younger students might show a difference in their attendance rate, effort, focus, task persistence, motivation, and, self-regulated learning. Thus, it was felt that it would be meaningful to investigate two attendance rates between these two groups.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of gender at university 1 which includes transgender students.

Table 1

Breakdown of gender

Gender	No. of participants
Female (University 1)	170
Male (University 1)	132
Grand Total	302

Table 2 shows the details of University 1's cohorts of groups by year between 2017/18 and 2021/22. Table 2 shows the breakdown of gender at university 1. The 302 students were studying Japanese as part of their degree (IWLP) within the faculty of Life Science, Social Science, Media, Arts, and Humanities between 2017/18 and 2021/22.

Table 2

Breakdown of the group of the cohort at University 1

Academic year	No. of groups
2021/22	5
2020/21	7
2019/20	4
2018/19	4
2017/18	4
Grand Total	24

Table 3 summarizes University 1 students' university year in this study and gender for Universities 1 and 2. The majority of students entered university directly after leaving school ranging between 18 and 21 (1st year to 3rd/4th year). The 4th year students are those who came back from study abroad in Japan or those who have higher Japanese language abilities and started from Intermediate Japanese.

Table 3

Participants number by university year of university 1 and participant number of university 2

	University year	No. of participants
University 1	1 st year (level 3)	186
	2 nd year (level 4)	100
	3 rd + 4 th year (level 5)	16
University 2	Mature students (level 4)	14
	Grand Total	316

Table 4 shows the gender of university 2.

Table 4

Breakdown of gender

Gender	No. of participants
Female (University 2)	10
Male (University 2)	4
Grand Total	14

14 mature students enrolled in this online course, understanding that it does not involve face-to-face teaching, which suggests that they prefer and can work at their own pace, at their own preferred time and place without distraction. The majority of them are intrinsically motivated to study Japanese as they have a strong interest in Japan and Japanese culture. They live worldwide (in various parts of the UK, USA, India, and Italy). The estimated average age of this cohort was over 40 years old and their occupations included civil servant, company, retired, teacher, consultant, PhD student, and professor.

2.3. Procedure

Two types of investigation were undertaken for both universities, but not necessarily simultaneously every year. First, attendance registers were taken throughout the modules and were analyzed and compared to determine any patterns in attendance for five years. Secondly, students' comments from Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQ) were obtained.

2.4. Ethical issues

As for access, this study needed to access students' attendance registers to obtain data. Access to the attendance register was not problematic as the researcher teaches Japanese at University 1 and has taught Japanese at University 2.

With regards to confidentiality, nobody other than the researcher had access to the data as the researcher collected and analyzed data. Identifying individual's names and their details was unnecessary for the study and no information about each individual was identified. Therefore, the students' confidentiality was protected in this study.

2.5. Data Analysis

2.5.1. Attendance rate

The researcher counts all students' attendance calculates attendance rates on the register and also enters into the university registers to keep a record for universities 1 and 2.

2.5.2. Students' comments

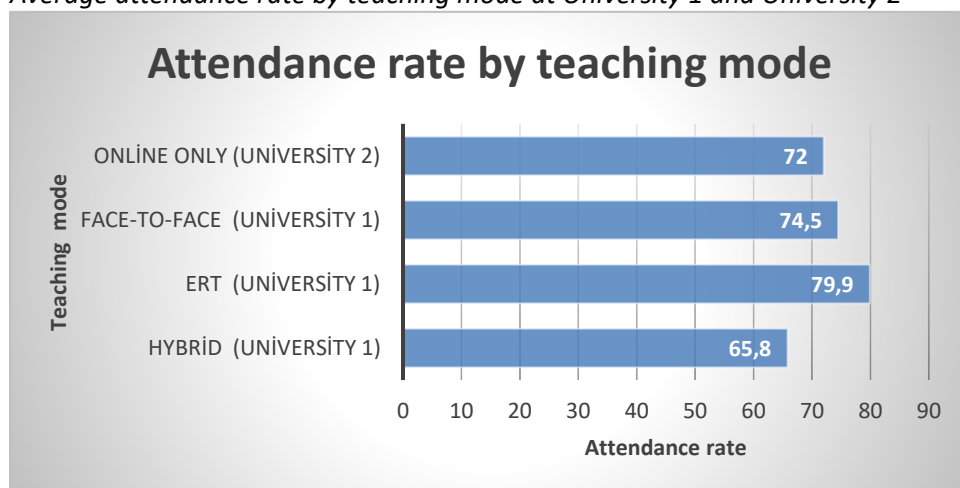
71% (10 out of 14 students) of students were categorized initially into positive and negative online responses. These primary categories were then divided into sub-categories related to their experience.

3. Results

The objective of this study was to find the teaching delivery mode that has the highest attendance rate among face-to-face-only, ERT, hybrid, and online-only courses. Face-to-face, ERT, and hybrid were conducted at University 1, and online-only was conducted at University 2. Figure 3 shows the order of the highest attendance rate: ERT (79.9%); face-to-face (74.5%); online (72%) and hybrid (65.8%). The attendance rate of face-to-face (74.5%) is the average of face-to-face for three years (2017/18, 2018/19 and 2020/21).

Figure 3

Average attendance rate by teaching mode at University 1 and University 2

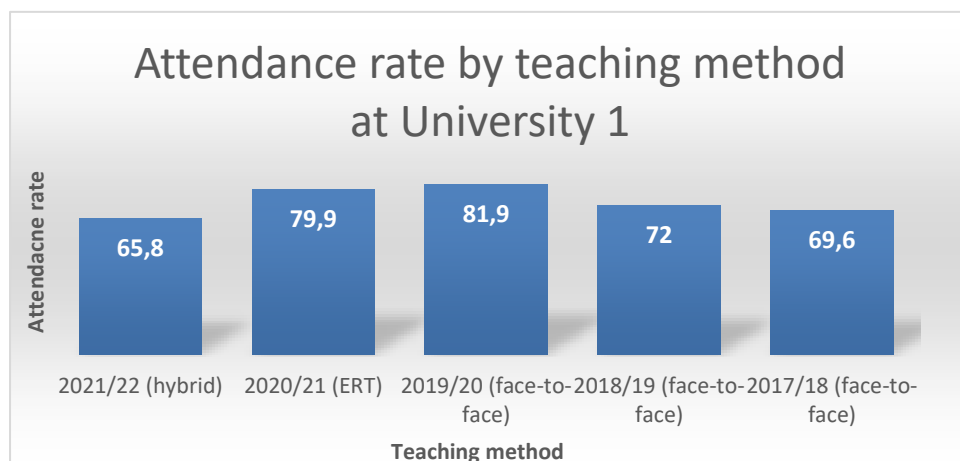


As the majority of participants are from University 1, Figure 4 focuses on the attendance rate at University 1 between 2017/18 and 2019/20 conducted at University 1: face-to-face (69.9%, 2017/18); face-to-face (72%, 2018/19) and face-to-face (81.9%, 2019/20).

I would like to add some background information on this high attendance rate (81.9%) of 2019/20. I noticed almost half of the class were students with mental health in the academic year 2017/18 and 2018/19. To support these students, I was conducting experimental classes to raise students' motivation for one cohort of the classes in 2018/19. These classes proved to be successful with an average attendance rate of 95% in 2018/19 from an average attendance rate of 67.5% in the Autumn Term of 2018/19 (Author, 2021). This will be described in detail in the face-to-face teaching next.

Figure 4

Attendance rate by year at university 1 (include detailed face-to-face attendance rate)



3.1. Attendance for face-to-face teaching (University 1, between 2017/18 and 2019/20)

A total of 139 students in the University (34 students in 2019/20, 51 students in 2018/19, and 54 students in 2017/18) between 2017/18 and 2019/20 included 21 students with mental health issues, some of whom were also in the Foundation Year. Some students had long-term absences (admitted to psychiatric hospitals, etc.) and never attended classes for one academic year. Students at this University can withdraw from one course at their discretion at any time during their tenure. Several students per year exercised this withdrawal due to their mental health deterioration. University 1 offered 'reasonable adjustment', for example, all teaching staff at the University was informed by e-mail to give a higher average mark in the previous face-to-face term. Alternative summative assessments were offered which were much easier and simpler than had been practiced in previous years. The assessments were also implemented with great flexibility online (Turnitin on Canvas), which allowed 48 hours.

Table 5 shows the breakdown of 21 students with mental health issues between 2017/18 and 2019/20 face-to-face teaching. Students' mental health ranges from mild to very serious, some of whom are admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

Table 5

Students with mental health issues and no of students

Mental health issues	No. of students
Depression and Anxiety	7
Anxiety with Depression	1
Depression	1
Depression, Anxiety, and OCD	1
Depression, Anxiety, and ADD	1
Depression, Anxiety and Panic Disorder	1
Type 1 Diabetes	2
Anxiety and OCD	1
Asperger's Syndrome	1
Autism Spectrum	1
Autism Spectrum and OCD	1
Dyslexia and Dyspraxia	2
Temporal Lobe Epilepsy	1
Total	21

Table 6 shows the details of students' mental health issues between 2017 and 2020.

Table 6

The details of the students with mental health between 2017 and 2020

	2019/2020	2018/2019	2017/2018
1 st year	4 (1 Dyslexia and Dyspraxia, 1 Depression, 1 Depression, Anxiety and ADD, 1 with Type 1 diabetes)	7 (1 Dyslexia and Dyspraxia, 2 Anxiety and Depression, 1 Anxiety with Depression, 1 Depression, Anxiety, and OCD, 1 Depression, Anxiety and Panic Disorder, 1 Autism Spectrum and OCD)	4 (3 Depression and Anxiety, 1 with Type 1 diabetes)
2 nd year	1 Autism Spectrum	N/A	Temporal Lobe Epilepsy
3 rd year	2 (1 Asperger's Syndrome, 1 Anxiety and Depression)	1 Anxiety and Depression	N/A
4 th year	1	N/A	N/A
Total of students with mental health	8	8	5
Attendance rate	81.9%	72%	69.6%

Although the number of students with mental health issues for 2018/19 and 1/2019/20 were both 8 students, 2019/20 had the highest attendance among face-to-face in the three years.

As explained earlier in the background information regarding the face-to-face attendance rate (81.9%), it was possible to say that this was due to the researcher's successful experimental classes to support the increasing number of students with mental health at university 1.

Table 7 (2018/19 attendance rate) and Table 8 (2019/20 attendance rate) are the detailed attendance rates of Figure 4, showing before (i.e., Table 7) and after (i.e., Table 8) the researcher's change of teaching. Both Tables 7 and 8 are face-to-face teaching attendance. The researcher has changed her teaching for the 2018/19 Sprint term and the 2019/20 Autumn term using psychological intervention to enhance students' motivation.

In both Tables 7 and 8, the second column shows the attendance rate of the Autumn term, the third column shows the attendance rate of the Spring term and the fourth column shows the average of the Autumn and the Spring term attendance. In Spring term 2018/19, approximately half of the class were students with mental health issues. The majority of students with mental health issues did not attend classes (the average attendance was 67.5%).

Table 7
2018/19 face-to-face teaching attendance rate

(Before)	Autumn term 2018/19 Attendance rate	Spring term 2018/19 Attendance rate	Average
1 st year 2018/19	76% (15 students which include 5 RAs)	59% (13 students which include 6 RAs)	67.5%

The experimental classes conducted during the Spring term, of 2018/19 (Table 7) proved to be successful, looking at the attendance rate (93%) of the following academic year, the Autumn term, of 2019/20 (Table 8) as the majority of the students continued studying Japanese the following year, who had face-to-face in Autumn 2019 (93%, Table 8) and up to the first five weeks in 2020 Spring term (96%) which made the average attendance rate for 2019/20 to be 95% (Table 8).

You may find a discrepancy between the average attendance rate of 2019/20 in Figure 4 (81.9%) and that of Table 8 (95%). This difference is due to the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. However, the researcher considers 2019/20 was mainly face-to-face teaching as only the six weeks of Spring term 2020 (out of 11 weeks) were taught online. The detail of the 2019/20 academic year is shown in Table 8 which is the first five weeks of face-to-face teaching (i.e., 'up to Week 5'), and after Week 6, the class moved online (ERT). One term comprises 11 weeks, and nearly half of the classes were conducted face-to-face, the researcher decided that the average attendance of both face-to-face and ERT online is 81.9% (Figure 4).

Table 8
Year 1 2019/20 face-to-face teaching attendance rate

(After)	Autumn term 2019/20 Attendance rate	Spring term (up to W5) 2019/20 Attendance rate	Average percentage
1 st year 2019/20	93% (15 students which include 4 RAs)	96% (13 students which includes 3 RAs)	95%

The attendance rate of 2017/18 was 69.9% (Figure 4), which applied no intervention to students. Focusing on the fourth column from the left (Average attendance rate for both Autumn and Spring terms) in Tables 7 and 8, it is possible to say that the experimental classes may have some positive influence on the 2018/19 attendance rate (72% in Figure 4), considering before intervention (67.5% in Autumn Term, 2018/19) and after the intervention (the average attendance rate of 95% in 2018/19).

3.2. Attendance for ERT (University 1, 2020/21)

Students experienced face-to-face in the Autumn term and online in the Spring term. The total cohort of groups during the ERT was 7 groups: 4 cohorts of 1st year students, 2 cohorts of 2nd year students, and 1 cohort of 3rd and 4th year students. In all seven groups, the attendance rate of the majority of students generally decreased from face-to-face to online except for the third year.

The average attendance rate for five years is 73.8%. The average attendance of the Covid ERT was 78.3% and the average of the 2021/21 academic year was the second highest followed by face-to-face (2018/19) in five years.

The second highest attendance rate may be because students accepted the difficulty of the Covid situation and tried to attend classes as if they attended face-to-face. Furthermore, as everyone had to stay at home during the Covid, students may miss and appreciate interacting with their peers even online.

3.3. Higher attendance rate in the second Spring term (ERT)

The second term (Spring) attendance rate for 1st and 2nd year was lower than the first term (Autumn) in all 5 classes except for 1st year class 3 and 3rd year. Several other reasons in the literature include: firstly, students begin to feel greater pressure; secondly, students estimated how well/bad they were doing on the course; and lastly, they felt that attending a certain class will have little effect on their grade (Van Blerkom, 1992).

In addition, another factor that may have contributed particularly to low attendance may be: early morning class (9:00–11:00 am) (Paisey and Paisey, 2004; Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor, 2007), competing commitments (Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor, 2007), days of the week (Doyle et al., 2008; Marburger, 2006), weather (Galichon and Friedman, 1985), paid employment (Paisey and Paisey, 2004), mental health issues (Kelly, 2012), etc

Table 9 shows an increase in Class 3's attendance rate (from 65.1% to 81.1%) in the Spring term 2019/20. I would like to add background information for this exception. This is due to the change of tutor in the Spring term in Class 3. As for the increase in 3rd year attendance rate (from 72.4 % to 81.3%), the tutor did not change between the Autumn and Spring terms.

Table 9

Year 1 2020/21 ERT attendance rate for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd students

	1st year Autumn (face-to-face)	1 st year Spring (ERT)	2nd year Autumn (face-to-face)	2 nd year Spring (ERT)	3rd year Autumn (face-to-face)	3rd year Spring (ERT)
2020/21						
Class 1	87.1	79.4	90.5	74.2	72.4	81.3
Class 2	81.3	69.7	97.1	79.7		
Class 3	65.1	81.1				
Class 4	80.9	76.0				
Average	78.6	76.6	93.8	77.0	72.4	81.3
						79.9

Perhaps, students may have perceived their learning experience as positive if they learned better, engaged, and enjoyed themselves with online synchronous sessions. This may demonstrate consistent and frequent attendance consistently for students' anticipated benefit to their learning and the repetition and interaction with teachers and peers (Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor, 2007; Yang et al., 2023).

3.4. Attendance for hybrid teaching (University 1, 2021/22)

Both online and face-to-face attendance rates decline towards the end of the course, which is in line with previous literature. Table 10 shows details of the 2021/22 attendance rate.

Table 10

Year 1 2021/22 hybrid teaching attendance rate for 1st and 2nd students

2021/22 Average: 65.8%	1 st year		2 nd year	
	Autumn term	Spring term	Autumn term	Spring term
Class 1 (on-line)	66.3	54.9	66.5	70.2
Class 2 (face-to-face)	70.1	64.9	71.2	56.7
Class 3 (face-to-face)	72.3	64.2	No Class 3	No Class 3
Average	69.6	61.3	68.8	63.4

2021/22 hybrid teaching comprised 77 1st and 2nd-year students (1st and 2nd students, 37 male and 40 female) which consist of five classes (1st-year Class 1, 1st-year Class 2, 1st-year Class 3, 2nd-year Class 1, and 2nd-year Class 2). The overall average attendance for the 5 cohorts of groups was 65.8%, which is below the average of 73.8%. This is the lowest attendance rate in this study due to a lack of teaching staff, which may have affected the quality of teaching.

In previous attendant rate study face-to-face studies, class attendance rates ranged between 30% and 40% (Moore et al., 2003) to 60% (Romer, 1993), 75% (Friedman et al., 2001), and 81.5% (Marburger, 2001).

3.5. Online is lower quality teaching?

It is claimed that students perceive that they gain insights and understanding via face-to-face tuition not attainable online (Gysbers, 2011). Hodges et al. (2020) also pointed out that online learning carries a stigma of being lower quality and inferior to face-to-face learning. The below 2nd-year students' comments clearly show in the MEQ comment:

"I would like to give constructive criticism of my year 1 undergraduate Initio Japanese online class that I completed last year. I didn't realize the poor quality of learning I received from that class until I came into my better second-year class, which is why I'm mentioning it here (as this is also anonymous). Even though I may have completed all of the beginner classes, I definitely wouldn't say that I was a beginner in speaking at all when it came to the real world. It also saddens me to hear that my peers from last year's class who are with the same tutor have to go through another year online."

However, research shows otherwise. Hollister et al.'s (2022) study concludes that online learning can be engaging for students.

Gysbers et al. (2011) claim that falling attendance may be more related to the pedagogical subject matter and the delivery style of individual lecturers. Many students prefer to go to face-to-face classes rather than study on their own. However, if teaching quality is poor (i.e., unclear, vague explanations, unchallenging content) (Kottasz, 2005; Donicar et al., 2009). If the teaching style is not for them, students perceive that attendance would lead to little academic gain (Romer, 1993) and consider that attending classes is going to waste their time (Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor, 2007). The majority of students predicted what would occur during the scheduled in-class time and its impact on their learning (Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor, 2007). Regardless of the mode of teaching, students evaluate the service they receive (Tomlinson, 2017) and students seem to apply the same logic to attend or not for both online and face-to-face teaching.

3.6. Higher attendance rate online than face-to-face

Despite the above students' view, however, the online attendance rate (70.2%) was higher than face-to-face (56.7%) in 2nd year Spring term, observing all 5 classes both online and face-to-face classes for 1st and 2nd year.

3.7. Attendance for online-only course (University 2, 2021/22)

Attendance records were taken in every class but the majority of mature students appear to be self-regulated and disciplined to study at home. The average attendance of the Autumn and Spring term was 72%. Table 11 also includes University 2's MEQ results on teaching, course content, and satisfaction evaluation.

Table 11
Attendance rate and MEQ results in university 2*

2021/22	Autumn term	Spring term
Student Number	14	9
Attendance rate	74%	70%
Satisfaction rate (the end of year only)	N/A	80%
Teaching evaluation (the end of year only)	N/A	4.4/5*
Content evaluation (the end of the year only)	N/A	4.6/5*

*1 is poor and 5 is excellent

3.7.1. Positive responses

3.7.1.1. Asynchronous recording

Gysbers et al. (2011) claim that some material is better communicated in the face-to-face format with the tutor and is also videoed. However, well-planned synchronous and asynchronous online-only tuition can be as good as face-to-face teaching. Some students commented that asynchronous recording supported students' learning as a tool for revision and to enhance understanding of difficult concepts through repetition at a user-controlled pace.

- "I thought that the format of Dr. X's pre-recorded lectures was excellent (revision at the start, followed by new material)".

3.7.1.2. Tutor's personality

Three students cited the tutor's personality as entertaining and inspiring. It is noteworthy to point out that if students appreciate their tutor's teaching style, they admit that any failure in their learning is their fault and do not blame tutors for their failure.

- "Dr X was an excellent teacher and the course content was equally excellent."
- "As a beginner in learning Japanese, I enjoyed the classes with X who is an empathetic teacher with tons of patience and good sense. Would love to proceed to the next level with Dr X as the teacher."
"The teaching itself was engaging and interesting, and any failings in my learning are my own. Dr X is a generous and encouraging teacher and I look forward to joining Japanese 2 in due course."

3.7.1.3. Online works better than face-to-face

It should be highlighted that some students find online work better than a face-to-face language course. This may be because some students are more interested in the language, more skilled academically, or more focused on academics which motivates them to attend class more often than students who are less interested, less skilled, or less focused.

- "I enjoyed the course. The handouts for preparing for the 'live' sessions were also really good. Dr X ran the live sessions well, catering to the needs of all her students. I was hoping to continue to Japanese 2 and was disappointed to hear that an online course might not be offered, as I thought it worked well (perhaps even better than a face-to-face language course)."

3.7.2. Negative responses

3.7.2.1. Asynchronous recording

The recordings are an integral part of students' online learning and students perceive distinct roles of synchronous and asynchronous modes of tuition. The captions in the language studies are not viewed as essential.

- "I found it disappointing that the Panopto recordings (asynchronous) lost their slide keys halfway through – this meant there was no way to search for a particular part of the lecture other than listening to it all again (possibly at fast speed). The captions, being automatically generated in English when the lecture was (at least partly) in Japanese, were next to useless."

3.7.2.2. Quality of technology

Unlike face-to-face teaching, where tutors distribute physical handouts, technology in online learning is an essential part of teaching. Tutors of any subjects are expected to be skilled at Zoom or Teams for university online teaching. There were occasional technical problems with the Teams interface (common to all such programs I'm sure) and with materials disappearing prematurely from Canvas.

3.7.2.3. Time difference issues

Online-only courses offered worldwide can present issues regarding time differences when they change the time twice a year. Consistent with previous study results, tutor's personalities appear to be important for students' attendance online, too.

- "It would have been great if the change in Time Zone in the UK was notified through mail. I missed the very last class of the course as I, in India, was unaware of the change in Time Zone. Would be grateful if such a provision is made!"

3.7.2.4. Disappointing

Poor competence in the subject leads to a lower self-efficacy estimate. If learners view themselves as less capable (low competence), they are more likely to avoid the effort, which affects their attendance and whole learning experience (Nicholson et al., 2013).

- "I enrolled for this course and enjoyed it to start with. However, I found the writing impossible and found the teaching inadequate to help with the complexity of the writing. Very disappointing."

4. Discussions

Face-to-face attendance of this study suggests that there are quite a few students who suffer from mental health issues which prevented them from attending, long-term absence, and withdrawal in some cases. However, the experimental study showed that it is possible to increase the attendance rate of students with mental health issues. This may increase the tutor's additional workload and realistically, not all tutors may be able to support these students as mental health is not their expert area of study. Understanding that students with mental health issues exist in all faculties, it is suggested that some staff of the psychology or/ medical department may be their experts in this area and work with these students, which may lead to the creation of student-tutor collaboration projects that would benefit both staff and students. Staff who support these students benefit from working on the project to support them as they can research their expertise area. Students also benefit as they can receive more current, suitable, and expert interventions and support from collaborating with them.

Comments of participants who experienced online-only courses imply that language tutors need to be aware of the diverse cohort of students' requirements and preferences. Certain aspects of online teaching were perceived as positive by some students but viewed negatively by others. For example, online learning and asynchronous recording were commented as better than face-to-face by some, but disappointing learning experiences by others. The tutor was seen to be engaging and interesting while others considered a lack of support. This point gives hybrid teaching more advantage to increase to more satisfaction from diverse cohorts of students' requirements and preferences.

In hybrid teaching, nearly 90 students had to be covered by two teaching staff. Tutors' teaching quality was compromised, which affected students' attendance negatively as this is the lowest attendance rate for 5 years. This was a reaction to the teaching staff shortage from the University 1's language department's decision not to recruit additional staff but to use the staff to be well worth the money. However, this value for money, or saving the cost and money or shallow approach raises questions about whether universities decide for students' best interest and teaching excellence. Perhaps, students may need to be more critical not to be deluded by lower-quality teaching as consumers in the educational sector. Students are entitled to make a strategic decision if they feel that attending a taught session may not be worthwhile (Clay and Breslow, 2006).

The system of learning has been evolving in higher education. About 50 years ago, class attendance was not optional in principle and practice but from 30 years ago, attendance became optional in principle and practice (Romer, 1993). The literature review shows that university lecturers expressed concerns about the new system of learning suggesting going back to mandatory attendance (Romer, 1993). The majority of studies suggest that the students' decisions to attend classes in any delivery mode seem to be influenced by previous experiences with lecturers, predicting what would occur during the class. Students perceive the value, impact, and quality of the lecture experience itself. It is possible to say that students appear to engage in constant decision-making to weigh up the benefits and costs of attending that is perceived value gained from attending.

Similar to optional attendance, when asynchronous recorded lectures were introduced, the literature shows that university lecturers expressed concerns and attributed students' low attendance to the new system of learning, asynchronous recorded lectures (Gysbers, 2011). Contrary to lecturers' concerns, the new system of learning, i.e., asynchronous recorded lectures, proved to have a minimum impact on students' attendance (Gysbers, 2011). From these previous examples, it may be possible to say that hybrid teaching will be here to stay and become the new norm of the system of learning.

The new system of learning also changes students' behavior. When attendance is considered autonomy and freedom associated with university life (Doyle et al., 2007), students are given opportunities to make choices. When students are given opportunities to make choices, they take a more critical approach and evaluate their university experience against their expectations of what they might expect for the price they pay.

5. Conclusion

This paper describes and compares the attendance rate of ERT classes, face-to-face classes, hybrid classes, and online-only classes with some students' feedback from online-only courses using two universities for a year. The limitations include that participants may have been focused on Japanese language learning at University 1 and University 2 who also may have included particular types of cohorts. Therefore, the result of this study cannot be generalized across disciplines and may not apply to others.

It was predicted that the highest attendance rate would be face-to-face followed by hybrid, ERT, and online-only. The order of high attendance in this study was ERT (79.9%) followed by face-to-face (74.5%), online (72%), and hybrid (65.8%).

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