Class Styles in a Private Japanese College:
A Qualitative Study of Student Experiences of Face-to-Face and Remote Classes

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many Japanese universities to broaden their classroom methods. This presented a challenge for students and faculty. To improve future education, effectiveness of remote classes is important. At Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts (DWCLA), there are 11 departments in six faculties across two campuses in Kyoto, Japan. The diverse types of departments mean science-focused programs with labs and liberal arts-focused programs with group discussions, make it difficult to evaluate effectiveness. A project team of seven faculty members from six departments conducted a mixed-methods study to discover how DWCLA students viewed their experiences of remote and face-to-face classes. In 2022, our research team conducted a survey and collected 752 responses from students from six departments. We then conducted interviews with 12 students. This paper will focus on the interview results. Over half of the interviewees favored face-to-face classes; however, some preferred remote classes, both on-demand and synchronous online classes using online class conferencing tools. We found that students especially felt it important to do face-to-face classes for subjects that had practical class activities such as lab work. However, some students preferred remote classes for large classes of required subjects. This led us to see the necessity of adapting various ways of conducting classes. It is important to use more than one education style to help more students learn effectively. However, to do this, it is necessary to help teachers improve their skills using online technology and encourage them to continue to develop their classes in the future.

Keywords: Class Styles, Ideal Classes, Remote Classes, Face-to-Face Classes, Qualitative Study, Japanese College

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many Japanese universities to broaden their classroom methods. This presented a challenge for students and faculty. To improve future education, effectiveness of remote classes is important. At Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts (DWCLA), there are 11 departments in six faculties across two campuses in Kyoto, Japan. The diverse types of departments including science-focused programs with labs and liberal arts-focused programs with group discussions, make it difficult to evaluate effectiveness. A project team of seven faculty members from six departments conducted a mixed-methods study to discover how DWCLA students viewed their experiences of remote and face-to-face classes. The departments were the Department of International Studies, Department of Social Systems Studies, Department of Clinical Pharmacy, Department of Nursing, Department of English, and the Department of Food Science and Nutrition, shown in Figure 1. In 2022, our research team conducted a survey and collected 752 responses from students from the six departments, three humanities and three sciences departments. We then conducted interviews with 12 students. This paper will focus on the interview results.

Figure 1: *The Six Departments Involved in the Study*
*(adapted from Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts, n.d.)*
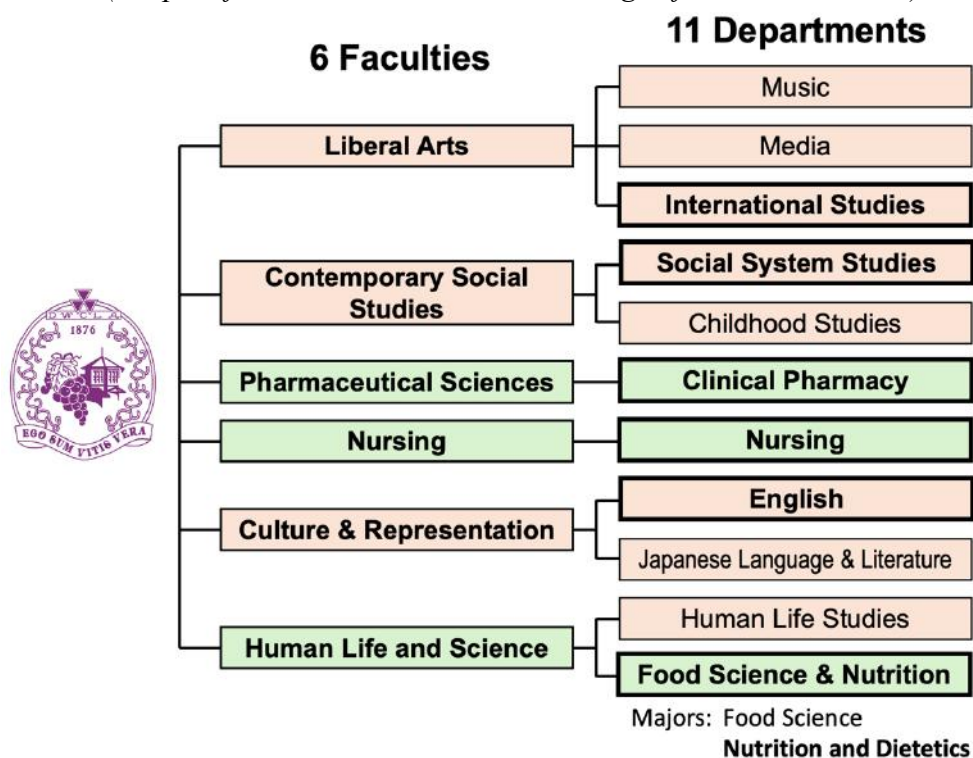
Background to the Study

During the 2020-2023 academic years, the impact of COVID-19 caused our university to change the way classes were delivered. In April 2020 all classes were cancelled and went online from May to July, using a combination of live communication tools such as Zoom, Webex, and Microsoft Teams as well as Manaba Learning Management System (LMS). There were online classes and some face-to-face classes from September 2020. In 2021 we held face-to-face classes while requiring all faculty and students to wear masks. In 2022 and

2023 classes were face-to-face with masks optional. Figure 2 illustrates the class delivery styles DWCLA utilized from 2020 until the end of 2023 academic years.

Figure 2: *Theoretical Framework of This Study (based on Galloway & Rose, 2017; Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts., n.d.; Warschauer, Heidi & Meloni, 2000).*
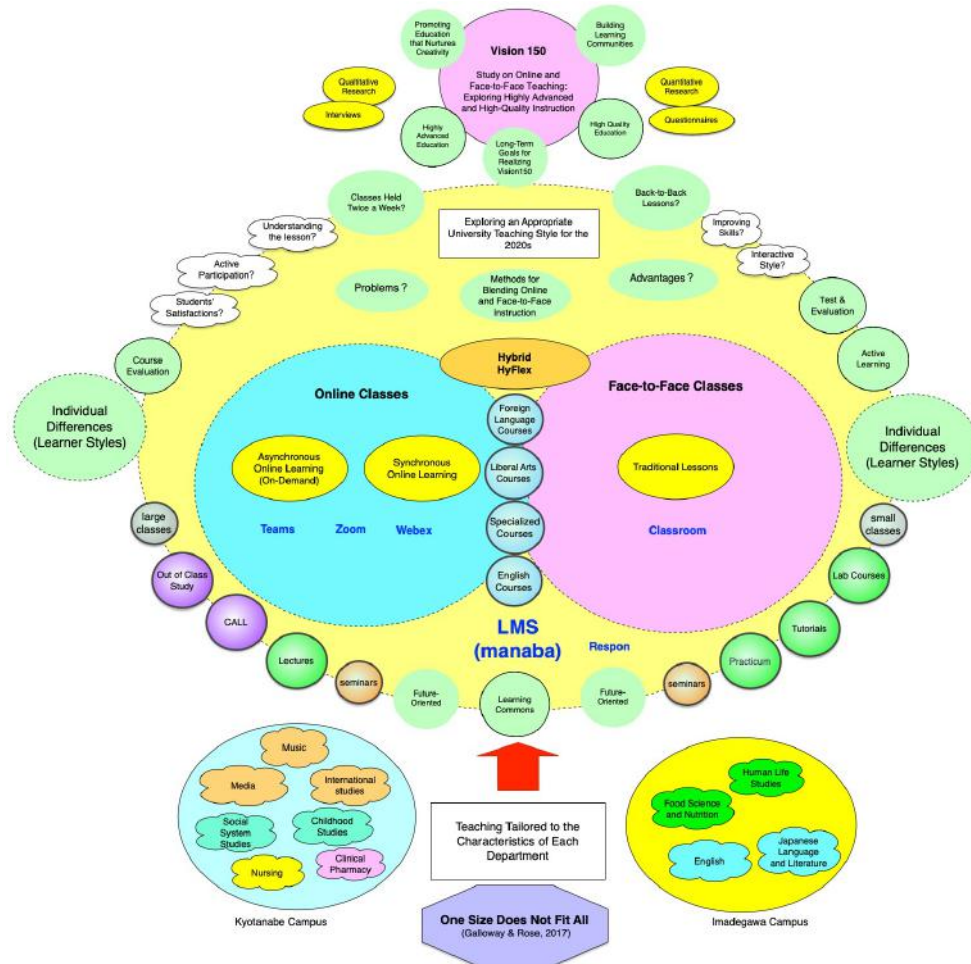
Because faculty members were not accustomed to using live communication tools, the Education and Research Center of DWCLA offered a series of workshops for teachers (both full-time and part-time) during the spring term of 2020. These workshops invited instructors from both inside and outside the college. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was a disaster, it inadvertently yielded benefits for both teachers and students: they acquired knowledge and skills for using digital devices both in and outside the classroom. Some have described this as "the most successful and large-scale" Faculty Development (FD) initiative (Oki, 2022). However, we argue that a single class style cannot be applied universally: One size does not fit all (Galloway & Rose, 2017). Depending on the nature of the class, such as large lectures or discussion-focused seminars, the appropriate class style should be selected. That is, teaching methods should be tailored to the characteristics of the class style and the specific department. Yet, the optimal class style has not been determined. This uncertainty forms the shared rationale for our study.

The Project

Our research project sought to clarify pros and cons of doing online classes and to explore ways to blend online and face-to-face classes in all 11 departments of six faculties while working towards the goals outlined in our college's Vision 150 (Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts, n.d.). We did this by clarifying the Pros and Cons of online classes and examining ways to blend online and face-to-face classes. We carried out the following two activities.

Activity 1: Clarifying the Pros and Cons of Online Classes
Our first step was to delve into the pros and cons of online classes. It's essential for both teachers and students to recognize that online classes, synchronous and asynchronous, are not merely substitutes for face-to-face instruction.

Activity 2: Blending Online and Face-to-Face Classes
Moving forward, we need to explore ways to blend online and face-to-face classes [education?] seamlessly. This exploration involves understanding how to combine these methods based on the distinct characteristics of the 11 departments and 6 faculties of our college. By doing so, we can create a dynamic and flexible learning environment.

Essentially, we explored ways to blend online and face-to-face classes seamlessly into the education programs at DWCLA. This exploration involves understanding how to combine these methods based on the distinct characteristics of the 11 departments and six faculties to create a dynamic and flexible learning environment.

Research Questions

The research questions to be explored in this study are as follows:
- RQ 1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of conducting online classes for college students in Japan?
- RQ 2: What are the ideal styles of college classes for students majoring in humanities and sciences?

Method

For this research project, we employed a mixed methods approach. We conducted individual structured interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes, with 12 female college students from six departments across six faculties over a period of approximately one month from March to April 2021. To maintain high reliability, interviewees were intentionally chosen from departments different from those to which the interviewers belonged. The interview guides were developed based on quantitative data analysis and the researchers' experiences over the last two academic years, 2020 and 2021. While we also collected quantitative data through a survey distributed to 752 college students, this paper will primarily focus on the interview data. The quantitative data were instrumental in developing our coding system, which focused on positive and negative responses to face-to-face and online classes, as shown in Table 1. For data analysis, we transcribed the recorded audio data and analyzed it using axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Additionally, we explored participants' preferences for ideal classes, categorizing online classes into three types: synchronous online (via Zoom/Microsoft Teams), asynchronous online (on-demand), and hybrid (a combination of face-to-face and online classes).

Table 1: *Coding System of Interviews for All Types Classes*

Parent Codes	Child Codes	Grandchild Codes
Face-to-face classes	(General)	Positive
	(General)	Negative
Online classes in general	(General)	Positive
	(General)	Negative
	Synchronous online (Zoom/Microsoft Teams)	Positive
	Synchronous online (Zoom/Microsoft Teams)	Negative
	Asynchronous online (on-demand)	Positive
	Asynchronous online (on-demand)	Negative
	Hybrid	Positive
	Hybrid	Negative
Ideal classes	(General)	

Results

Comments from the 12 students revealed a range of positive and negative experiences and perspectives on the different class delivery styles within both the humanities and science departments. These comments offer insights into their varied experiences. We present the results categorized by the codes outlined in Table 1.

Positive Experiences of Online Classes in General

There were predominantly three positive aspects of online classes mentioned in the interviews, illustrated by comments in Table 2. Regardless of the department, participants acknowledge the following advantages:
1. More chances to attend various classes on different campuses. As our college has two campuses, and participants found it convenient to attend classes on different campuses through online classes.
2. Being able to save time and money on commuting and lunch. Some interviewees also mentioned the convenience of not having to wear makeup for online classes. Since students did not have to commute, they were able to save time and money. Additionally, some interviewees mentioned the convenience of not having to wear makeup in online classes. This aspect is particularly relevant to our Women's College.
3. Actively being able to search for information while attending online classes to help them understand content more deeply immediately. Some participants admitted that they could search for information related to the lecture or discussion while attending a class online. This is usually difficult in face-to-face classes.

Table 2: *Positive Comments on Online Classes in General*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments; Science Departments
More Chances	"Attending classes at both campuses becomes possible."
Saving Time and Money	"Because there's no time spent on commuting to and from school, it can be used for other purposes, saving time. It also saves on lunch expenses."
Active Learning with Online Resources	"I find that my understanding deepens when I listen to discussions and simultaneously search for related information on the web."

Negative Experiences of Online Classes in General

There are, of course, negative aspects of online classes mentioned in the interviews, as shown by students' comments in Table 3. The two main negative aspects were as follows.
1. Loneliness. Many participants experienced feelings of loneliness. Because they could only attend classes online, even small group discussions in Zoom breakout rooms led to a strong sense of loneliness.
2. Not Real Experiences. This comment came from a participant in the nutrition department. Concerning experiments, they said that merely looking at photos was insufficient. They emphasized the need for actual participation in experiments.

Table 3: *Negative Comments on Online Classes*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments	Science Departments
More Chances	"I feel a strong sense of loneliness and experience significant emotional lows."	
Not Real Experiences		"The experiments are something that should be done by hand to deepen understanding. In online classes we only looked at photos of the experiments performed by the teacher and wrote reports based on that. I believe that true experimentation involves coming to school and doing it yourself."

Positive Experiences of Synchronous Zoom Classes

There were also positive aspects of synchronous online classes mentioned in the interviews, shown in Table 4. Most classes used Zoom and were related to visual assistance and concentration.
1. Seeing visible facial expressions was one advantage. Unlike in a physical classroom, participants could join a class without wearing a mask, enabling them to see the

teacher's mouth. This was particularly beneficial for communication in English and for learning pronunciation.

2. Concentration was difficult. In Zoom classes, teachers often asked students to turn on their cameras. Unlike their on-demand classes, students had to maintain better concentration because they were visible to others.

Table 4: *Positive Comments on Online (Zoom or Teams) Classes*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments; Science Departments
Visible Facial Expressions	"Since we could take off our masks, we were able to see the teacher's mouth for pronunciation and such."
Concentration	"There's a sense of tension from being seen on camera and the possibility of being called on during the session, which helps me concentrate. We can share everyone's opinions, ask questions about things we don't understand right away, and also share others' questions on the spot."

Negative Experiences of Synchronous Zoom Classes

Regarding the negative aspects of synchronous online classes, limitations caused by using technology were mentioned:

1. Communication difficulties was one thing mentioned. Participants particularly faced difficulties in communicating when talking with students they didn't know, as interaction was limited to being only on screen.

2. There was instability and problems with Wi-Fi, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. Sometimes, students borrowed a PC from the college, and when it malfunctioned, they had no means to report that their PC was not working correctly. Additionally, teachers and students accessed the internet from various locations and sometimes had unstable Wi-Fi connections.

While it may seem like a fundamental issue, network instability is critical to anticipate for the success of synchronous online classes. Figure 7 showed frustrations students experienced.

Table 5: *Negative Comments on Online (Zoom or Teams) Classes*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments; Science Departments
Communication Difficulties	"Since I sometimes take classes with students from other departments, it was difficult to speak up when everything went online, and I didn't know anyone at all."
Instability & Troubles with Wi-Fi, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams	"I couldn't attend due to issues with the laptop I borrowed from the university, and I wasn't able to explain this to the teacher, which I would have been able to do if it was in person."

Positive Experiences of Remote Classes: Asynchronous Online Classes (On-Demand)

Students had some positive things to say about asynchronous online classes, which were on-demand. The advantages were Repeated Viewing and Viewing Speed, shown in Table 6, the ability to control the speed of a recording and watch it several times.

Table 6: *Positive Comments on Asynchronous Online Classes (On-Demand)*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments; Science Departments
Repeated Viewing	"Because it was possible to watch the lessons (or course materials) repeatedly as many times as I wanted, I kept viewing them until I was satisfied with my understanding."
Speed Viewing	"Can be viewed in fast forward (at 1.5x speed)."

Negative Experiences of Remote Classes: Asynchronous Online Classes (On-Demand)

Regarding negative things about asynchronous online classes, participants reported Understanding Difficulties and Procrastination. Procrastination especially emerged as a significant problem. As students had several days to watch on-demand recordings, some tended to delay doing their on-demand homework. Table 7 comments illustrate the struggles students had with on-demand classes.

Table 7: *Negative Comments on Asynchronous Online Classes (On-Demand)*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments; Science Departments
Difficulties Understanding	"During (face-to-face) lectures, I can listen attentively and the teacher's explanations make things easy to understand. However, with on-demand classes, there are no (additional) explanations, so I have to interpret everything on my own, and that was challenging."
Procrastination	"Because it was possible to watch the lessons (or course materials) repeatedly as many times as I wanted, I kept viewing them until I was satisfied with my understanding."

Positive Experiences of Hybrid Classes

Some students had positive experiences of hybrid classes as shown in Table 8 comments. Two positive things mentioned about hybrid classes were feeling comfortable with a hybrid style and ease of understanding through various styles of delivery. Details include the following:
1. Concerning hybrid classes, a mixture of face-to-face and online learning: students had very few experiences with them and, accordingly, very few comments. Participants found that face-to-face and online classes seemed to complement each other, and they felt comfortable with this a style of class that included both.
2. Easy of understanding: Particularly for experiments, understanding the entire procedure beforehand using video proved to be effective: two ways of getting class

content and complementary online approaches helped make it easier to understand and carry out face-to-face experiments for more effective learning.

Table 8: *Positive Comments on Hybrid Classes*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments	Science Departments
Two Channels	"When class meets, we have face-to-face sessions at the university, and during long holidays, we can discuss things with the teacher via Teams. This was very convenient and easy to do."	
Ease of Understanding (Experiment)		"I watched a video and gained some understanding of a procedure before doing the experiment. This approach was easier because, rather than receiving oral explanations from the teacher right before the experiment, I watched a video, understood the process to a certain extent, and then proceeded with the experiment. So, doing experiments in this way was more manageable."

Negative Experiences of Hybrid Classes

However, there were also negative aspects to doing hybrid types of classes: students experienced confusion and difficulty with their class schedules. Sometimes, students became confused, forgetting when they had face-to-face classes and when their online classes were scheduled. With several classes in one day, including a mix of face-to-face and online formats, they found it challenging to organize their schedules. Table 9 highlights some comments made by study participants.

Table 9: *Negative Comments on Hybrid Classes*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments; Science Departments
Difficulties Understanding	"During (face-to-face) lectures, I can listen attentively and the teacher's explanations make things easy to understand. However, with on-demand classes, there are no (additional) explanations, so I have to interpret everything on my own, and that was challenging."
Procrastination	"Because it was possible to watch the lessons (or course materials) repeatedly as many times as I wanted, I kept viewing them until I was satisfied with my understanding."

Positive Experiences of Traditional Style: Face-to-Face Classes

Besides being familiar modes of learning, experiences of traditional face-to-face classes showed positive aspects of that might be self-evident (Table 10). Students felt it was easier to communicate in face-to-face settings. They also felt teachers did things more spontaneously such as drawing diagrams on the blackboard or whiteboard when they noticed students needed help to understand concepts.

Speaking and Interactions were viewed more favorably in face-to-face classes. Students found it easier to communicate in face-to-face settings especially in classes that involve discussions and interactions.

Improvisation was also a positive aspect. Classes did not always have to proceeded as planned. If teachers noticed that students' understanding was insufficient, they provided additional information by writing on the blackboard or whiteboard, as mentioned in Table 10. These kinds of additions contributed to students' in-depth understanding.

Table 10: *Positive Comments on Traditional Style (Face-to-Face) Classes*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments; Science Departments
Speaking & Interactions	"Classes that focus on activities like speaking and interacting with others are better conducted face-to-face."
Improvisation	"When explanations are given using tools like blackboards or whiteboards, and diagrams are drawn, it makes it easier to understand."

Negative Experiences of Traditional Style: Face-to-Face Classes

Students mentioned two negative things about face-to-face classes: 1) they felt not having the ability to replay a lecture like they could for on-demand class videos meant they had to concentrate more even though they could still ask the teacher to clarify something; and 2) they felt the burden of long commuting times to get to school as well as expensive train fares (Table 11).

Table 11: *Negative Comments on Traditional Style (Face-to-Face) Classes*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments; Science Departments
No Playback Option	"In face-to-face classes, it's not possible to easily go back and listen to important points again."
Long Commuting Time to School	"It's a real pain to have to wake up early every morning and come in, especially when there are only one or two classes."

Ideal Classes

Finally, we asked the participants about their ideal classes at the end of the interviews. The characteristics they thought should be part of ideal classes were as follows, with comments in Table 12 supporting the characteristics.
1. Receiving feedback from teachers.

2. Ability to attend classes at different campuses.
3. For practicum classes, hands-on experiences are considered essential.
4. Face-to-face styles are preferred for lab classes, practicums, and tutorials.
5. For lecture classes, including liberal arts lectures, on-demand options that allow for repeated viewing would be more effective.
6. A blend of face-to-face and online classes might represent the ideal class structure.

Table 12: *Comments on Ideal Classes*

Characteristics	Humanities Departments	Science Departments
Feedback	"The most important thing is to receive feedback from the teacher."	
Attending Classes in Different Campuses	"It is good that there are increasing opportunities to take courses offered on distant campuses through online classes."	
Repeated Viewing for Lecture Class & Liberal Arts Lecture Classes	"Face-to-face is preferable in all aspects, but for lectures, on-demand options that allow for repeated viewing are also effective."	
Blended Classes	"If everything is online, I really end up not going to university and become shut-in, so it's better to have a style where lecture subjects are taught face-to-face, and then the classes are also made available online afterwards."	
Emphasis on hands-on Experiences		"The value of practicum lies in the accumulation of hands-on experiences."
Lab Classes/Practicum/ Tutorials		"Practical exercises (hands-on training) must absolutely be conducted face-to-face."

Discussion

Findings for Research Question 1

To summarize, in relation to research question 1, What are the advantages and disadvantages of conducting online classes for college students in Japan? There are two insights we can derive from students' experiences. Online classes offer several advantages. For online classes in general, these include saving time and money, having more opportunities, and actively using online resources during classes. In synchronous online classes, advantages are visible facial expressions and enhanced concentration. Asynchronous online classes provide the benefits of repeating and controlling the playback speed for viewing videos. For hybrid classes, the key advantages are dual learning channels and ease of understanding through complementary class styles.

Regarding disadvantages, online classes present various challenges. For online classes, these include loneliness and a lack of authentic experiences. Issues such as communication difficulties and problems with unstable Wi-Fi, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams are prevalent in synchronous classes. Asynchronous classes often lead to difficulties in understanding and

procrastination. Additionally, hybrid classes can cause confusion and complicate class scheduling for students.

Findings for Research Question 2

Regarding research question 2 about ideal class styles, what are the ideal college classes for students majoring in humanities and sciences? We can identify four key insights from students' experiences:
1. Face-to-face classes seem to offer significant advantages over online classes.
2. However, online classes should not be entirely dismissed, as they hold substantial potential for improving learning efficiency and for saving time and money.
3. The core issue is not choosing between face-to-face or online lessons but finding the most suitable class styles for each department and its students. A one-size-fits-all approach is impractical, as different students and departments have unique needs and preferences.
4. To achieve this, colleges need to develop flexible and efficient administrative curriculum designs.

A recent news article in Japan reports that Japanese educational institutions face challenges in transitioning from traditional analog methods to digitalization (Hisanaga, ,2023). While reverting to pre-COVID-19 practices might seem easier, it is not the best option. The COVID-19 pandemic led all educators, from elementary to university levels, to experience online classes. Despite the challenges, this period introduced new methods of instruction and learning, including online lessons.

**Table 13:** *Summary of Findings for Research Questions 1 and 2*

| Research Question	Findings
RQ 1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of conducting online classes for college students in Japan?	1. There are several advantages: saving time and money, more opportunities, active learning with online resources (online classes in general); visible facial expressions, concentration (synchronous); repeated viewing, speed viewing (asynchronous); two channels, smooth understanding (hybrid). 2. Quite a few disadvantages were also reported: loneliness, not real experiences (online classes in general); communication difficulties, instability & troubles with Wi-Fi, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams (synchronous); difficulties understanding, procrastination (asynchronous); confusion, difficult class schedule.
RQ 2: What are the ideal college classes for students majoring in humanities and sciences?	1. Overall, Face-to-face classes seem to have great advantages over online classes. 2. Online classes should not be totally abandoned: Possibilities for improving learning efficiency and saving time and money. 3. Each department and its students have their unique "best-fit class" styles; therefore, we should not promote a one-size-fits-all approach.

Class Delivery Models for Humanities and Science Department Classes

From 2020 to 2023, DWCLA used various styles of class delivery. Students commented on their experiences and views of the positive and negative aspects of each style. Figure 3 summarizes the various models that were used and can be used in future humanities department classes. Figure 4 summarizes those for the students in science department classes.

Figure 3: *Class Delivery Models for Humanities Department Classes*
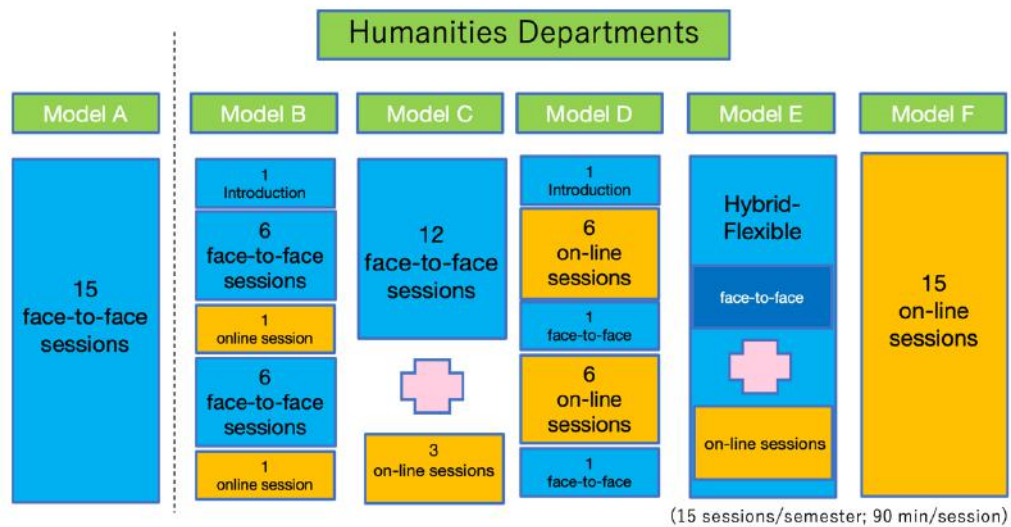
Figure 4: *Class Delivery Models for Humanities Science Classes*
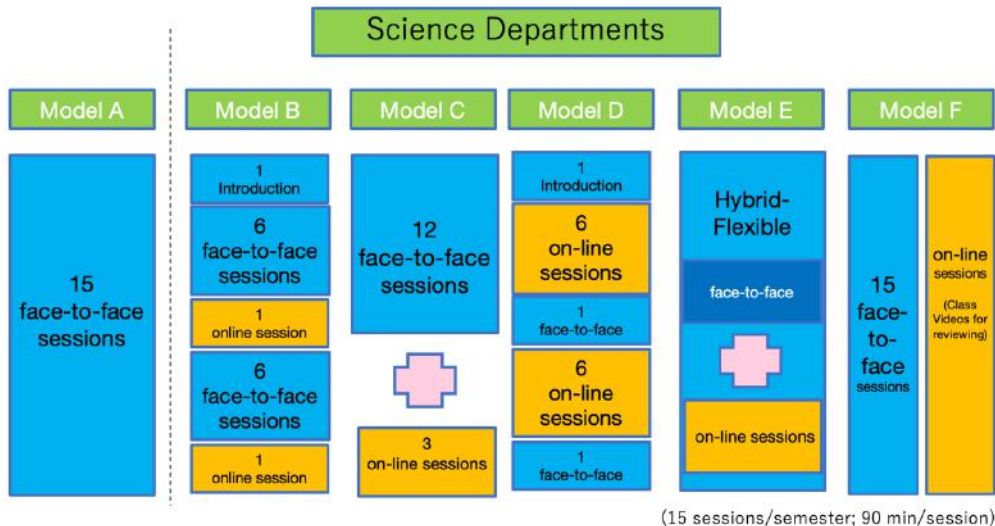
Model A represents traditional face-to-face class styles, which we should not abandon. However, it's not necessary for all classes across different departments to adopt this model strictly. Models B to E offer teachers the flexibility to tailor their approaches to meet the unique and diverse objectives of their courses. For instance, Model E, the Hybrid-Flexible style, enables students to attend in person while also participating online with their digital devices, fostering an environment where students of different personalities can select their

preferred mode of engagement and achieve a higher level of active learning. In science departments, rather than holding all sessions online (as in Model F for Humanities Departments), sessions could be recorded for students to review through shared online videos (Model F for Science Departments). The key is not to adhere strictly to a class style determined by the Registrar's Office but for colleges to provide a variety of class styles. This flexibility allows teachers and even students to select the most suitable style to achieve their educational objectives. Now, with both teachers and students equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for digital learning, and with a fully prepared digital environment, we must not miss the opportunity to realize ideal class settings in college.

Limitations of This Study

Upon completing our study, we found some limitations. We recognize there were limitations related to the data collection period and the amount of data we were able to collect.
- **Data Collection Period**: We collected interview data in 2021, when the online classes were nearly over, by asking participants to reflect on their academic year of 2020. The interviews might have been more effective if conducted one year earlier.
- **Limited Data:** Although there are 11 departments in our college, we collected interview data from only 6 departments. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ideal class style, more data was needed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, colleges should provide a variety of class delivery methods, as exemplified in the models presented in the previous slides. This approach would enable teachers to select the style that best suits both themselves and their students. In the business world, we have already seen the remaining influences of COVID-19. According to Bloom (2023), three groups benefit, and three do not from changes in how business is conducted. The ones facing challenges are office building owners, transport companies, and large cities. The beneficiaries are workers, companies, and the environment. Workers can go to the office three or four times a week and work from home the other days. This lets some move to the countryside for bigger homes and better natural surroundings, saving time and money on commuting. Education institutions can learn from this. Using online classes wisely, we can see these five benefits:
1. Students learn more effectively.
2. Teachers improve teaching efficiency and have time for research.
3. Colleges can use resources better.
4. The environment benefits, helping to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
5. Society can become more innovative.

Colleges/Universities should offer the choice of various kinds of class styles (face-to-face/online classes [asynchronous/synchronous] /hybrid/Hybrid-Flexible) so that departments and teachers can choose class styles that best fit them and their students.

To avoid a biggest loser (Bloom, 2023) and to achieve five wins, judicious use of online lessons should be seriously considered NOW to accomplish five wins in the field of college education:
1. Win for Students: Achieving success through efficient learning.
2. Win for Teachers: Enhancing instruction and increasing research time.
3. Win for Colleges/Universities: Resource optimization.

4. Win for the Environment: Fulfilling Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
5. Win for Society: Driving progress through innovation.

By selecting the best education delivery option, as illustrated in the various delivery methods shown in Figures 3 and 4, we can create a brighter future for education in Japan.

Acknowledgements

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