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SOCIAL LEARNING DURING ONLINE LEARNING? THE CASE FOR JAPANESE LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Teaching language was once thought to be only possible to be done face-to-face. The pandemic has changed not only the mode of learning of language for learners, it has also changed the way people view language learning. One good thing that comes out from the pandemic is that people are forced to accommodate online communication. As a result, many have proven that language learning can be done successfully online. This study is done to investigate the perception of learners on their language instructors' teaching the Japanese language via online. This study is rooted from two main theories -social learning theory and online engagement- to explain the sense of engagement learners perceive. The instrument used is a survey with 24 items and 5 Likert-scale. 433 students responded to the survey. Findings revealed that learners needed positive stimulus to give positive response in learning behaviour. Learners also learnt form modelling their instructors. Finally, they also learn well in an environment where there are supportive peers to help them cope with online engagements. Findings bear interesting implications towards the learning and teaching of language via online.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature of online activities for the teaching and learning of Japanese. The pandemic has accelerated the need to have all learning online-even in the learning of languages. Online learning is made even more successful with the inclusion of engagement among learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

The pandemic has escalated the need to turn all meetings online. Teaching language used to be done traditionally face-to-face and now both learners and instructors have to learn to cope with online meetings. According to Moore, Dickson-Deane, and Galyen (2020) there are many perceptions of online learning environments and some call it distance learning, e-learning or online learning. By 2021, many have realised that online learning is the new norm for learning. Call it any way, online learning is here to stay!

The rush to convert all teaching and learning into online mode has caused fear for the language learners. According to Rahmat (2020) the fear of language learning stems from the learners' beliefs and these beliefs may escalate to communication apprehension. These fear of communication may be heightened as online learning limits learners of one-to-one communications. Learners may not feel comfortable if their lack of communication skills becomes public when they communicate online. In addition to that, lack of practice in language used in the target language may then cause communication apprehension among learners. Nevertheless, the wave of COVID-19 in the world has forced even language learning to go online thus limiting one-to-one communication that face-to-face lessons can offer.

The shift from face-to-face mode to online mode comes with some other worries. Instructors are adapting to preparing online materials for classroom learning. Learners are coping with the new way of receiving information, new ways of learning and also new ways of assessment.

Yet another worry about online learning is the learning environment for foreign language learning. This learning environment enables attitudes and beliefs of a language to be developed (Alhamami, 2018). With online learning, there is a fear that language learning environment becomes virtual and learners would miss the real interaction with speakers of the same language. Attitudes and beliefs of a language can only be formed through face-to-face interaction.

1.2. Statement of Problem

Online learning is here to stay and many are making adjustments to accept this new norm. According to Ju and Mei (2018) the combination of both traditional and online learning can help increase learners' interest in their learning process. Learning online enables learners to learn at their own pace. Besides, learning online teaches learner life skills that can help them in their research skills, their ability to do self-learning, as well as learn self-engagement skills together with a sense of responsibility.

Nevertheless, some instructors complained that in some cases, online learning has failed. The study by Rai and Chunrao (2016) explained why online learning may not be a success. Firstly, some learners are passive and preferred to be given information rather than to be asked to search for information they needed. Secondly, with some online learning situations, students do less compared to face-to-face interactions. This has led to failure to produce critical thinkers. Thirdly, some students are not motivated to learn because of the absence of teacher. Next, some students felt they were not properly guided and they felt overburdened. Finally, some students did not really gain the information conveyed as they may be "present" in class but they are doing other non-academic/non-related activities at the same time.

Hence, this study is done to investigate what learners feel about engagement during online learning. It is hoped that the findings can help instructors plan online learning that helps learners to engage better during online learning.

1.3. Objective and Research Questions

The objective of this study is to look into how learners perceive engagement during online learning. Specifically, this study investigates perception of learners on (a) learner-learner engagement, (b) learner-to-instructor engagement and (c) learner -to-content engagement. The findings are presented based on the following research questions:

1. *How does learner -to-learner engagement influence online learning of Japanese language?*
2. *How does learner-to-instructor engagement influence online learning of Japanese language?*
3. *How does learner-to-content engagement influence online learning of Japanese language?*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Strategies of Learning Japanese Language

Traditionally Japanese language can be learnt in several ways. These different ways have prompted many authors to write textbooks on how to learn the language. Three popular approaches are; (a) Grammar-translation, (b) audiolingual/audiovisual and (c) communicative language. Firstly, in grammar-translation classes, students learn grammatical rules. They are then taught to apply the rules by translating sentences between the target language and the native language. Next, the audiolingual/ audiovisual approach is taught based on the principles of bahviourism. Language is taught through conditioning, stimuli, response to form new habits of second language. This method puts more focus on spoken language and oral communication. Finally, communicative language teaching looks at language used in context, both linguistic and situational. Learners not only learn the language that is used but they also learn in what circumstances the language is being used. In this approach, students are given tasks to accomplish using language instead of studying the language through the communicative approach by communicating with their peers.

2.2. Learning Japanese Online

The learning of Japanese online has been done for quite a while. These are factors that made it less successful and factors that can make learning Japanese online successful for the learners. The study by Itoh and Charles (2002) to explored students' perception on taking quizzes online. The quizzes were given to students from liberal arts in a college. The quizzes were prepared by the lecturers to help the students in their exam. Throughout the semester, students were found to access the quizzes often. Findings revealed that the students accessed the quizzes with their peers right before their exam. The findings also showed that the quizzes were used for reviewing and preparing for exams- and not for regular learning as expected. So, although students were comfortable using online quizzes, but they were not using online learning facilities on a regular basis.

On the other hand, Shabudin, Aisyah, Darus, and Mimiko (2014) investigated the efficacy of using Web 2.0 applications compared to the traditional approach of using a textbook in foreign language learning. One teacher and 55 students participated in the study. The students used Jing and YouTube apps as well as the Screen.cast.com application and Wordpress. They responded on a questionnaire. Students reported that the apps helped them in their studies. They also said that they saved time copying notes from the teachers as well. They enjoyed the activities such as role play, question and answer, simulation, and so on.

2.3. Past Studies

Learners online learning experience is dependent on the instructors' competency in using technology in their online classes. Ju and Mei (2018) explored the use of blended learning among instructors. learning foreign languages. 5 instructors teaching different foreign languages in a university. The instruments used were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The investigation was carried out in stages. Findings revealed that the instructors felt that they lacked competence and experience in e-communication. This somehow affected their communication with the students. In addition to that, Alqahtani and Rajkhan (2020) looked at five learning systems uses by instructors in online learning. 69 e-learning mangers in educational institutions were interviewed. Findings showed that e-learning increased instructors' technology management, increased support from management, and also increased student awareness to use E-learning systems.

Online classes succeeded when instructors have positive attitude towards the online mode. Kabata, Wiebe, and Chao (2005) conducted a study to explore the experience of instructors teaching Japanese. The study was conducted at the University of Alberta's to investigate instructors' experience on the use of CALL courseware (Computer-Assisted Language Learning). The courseware was also used in line with WebCT, Wimba voice conferencing, and NJstar. The students were assessed on their use of the courseware and all related technology that were used with it.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to analyze how the Japanese courseware was viewed by both students and instructors. Findings showed that both students and instructors have positive experience with the technology. The positive experience by the instructors was an important determinant for the students' positive acceptance.

In addition to that, learners enjoyed online classes when they are competent in using the online tools. Moore. and Iida (2010) carried out a research to investigate the frequency of use of the online portion of a course developed in Blackboard 9 for a Japanese communication course at the University of New South Wales. . The research is focused on the use of on the three LMS tools: Groupwork tool, Downloadable quiz, and Discussion Platform. A survey was given to the 121 students. Findings revealed that while the usage of the course's online portion and the individual resources may differ, the frequency of the student's use of online supplementary course coursework has an impact to their positive view of the educational value. It also gives impact to the creation of academic skills. Findings also showed that the frequency of student usage is determined by their approach to online learning. It also depended on their ability to use various functions, as well as their ability use the same resources by their peers, and their access to the computer.

2.4. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Two main theories are combined to form the theoretical framework of the study. The two theories are (a) Bandura's Social learning theory and (b) Engagement in online Learning.
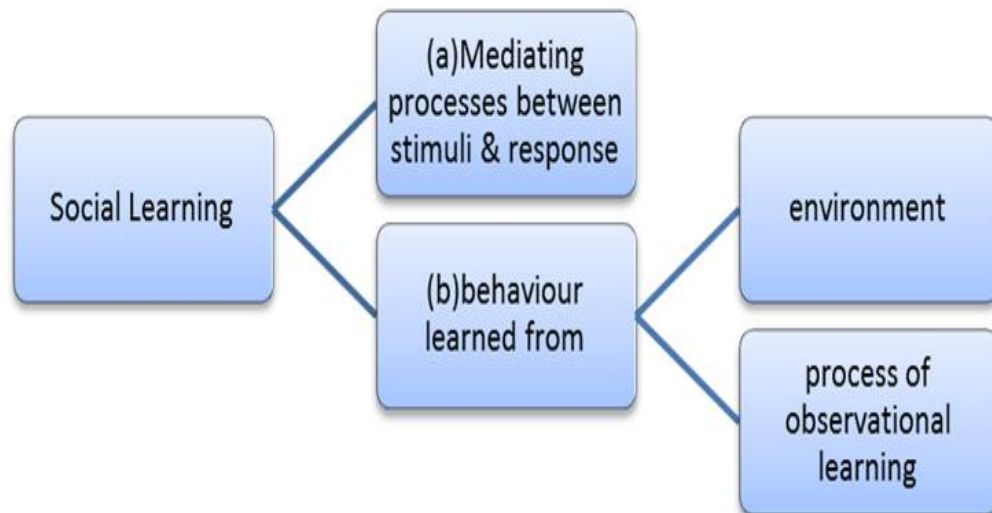
2.4.1. Bandura's Social Learning theory

Figure-1. Conditions for Social learning.
Source: Bandura (1977).

Figure 1 presents (Bandura, 1977) conditions for social learning to occur. Social learning is a situation where there is an exchange between stimuli and response. When learners are given positive stimuli in the learning process, there is a high possibility that they will produce positive response towards the learning experience. In addition to that, according to McLeod (2016) people learn from the society in various ways. In addition to that, according to McLeod (2016) people learn from the society in various ways Firstly, people learn through a series of mediating processes that occur between stimuli & their responses. Next a behaviour is learnt from the environment through the process of observational learning

2.4.2. Engagement in Online Learning

Figure-2. Engagement in online learning.
Source: Martin and Bolliger (2018).

Figure 2 presents the types of engagement that can take place during online learning. According to Martin and Bolliger (2018) three types of engagement will determine the success of online learning. The first type is learner-to-instructor. The learner needs to feel as connected to the instructors as they did in a traditional face-to-face class. It is up to the instructor to plan the sessions in such a way to allow as much engagement a possible. Next, learners need to have learner-to-content engagement during online learning. Traditional talk-and-power point slides may not be sufficient to make sure learners understand the content of the lesson. Instructors need to plan activities so that the learners can feel connected to the content. Finally, whether in traditional classroom or online classrooms, learners need to communicate with their peers. Learner-to-learner engagement is needed so that learners have their peers to help them learn.

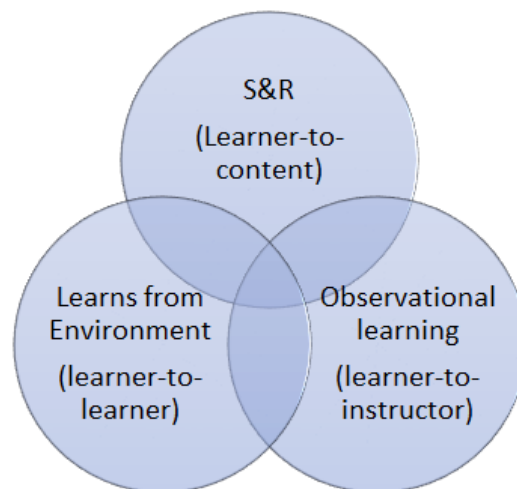*2.4.3. Combining Social Learning and Engagement in Online Learning*

Figure-3. Theoretical framework of the study: online engagement through social learning.
Source: Bandura (1977); Martin and Bolliger (2018).

The theoretical framework of the study is presented in Figure 3. This framework is rooted from the social learning theory. According to McLeod (2016) social learning states that learners need three conditions to learn from the society around them; (a) stimulus & response (S&R), (b) learning from environment and (c) observational learning (OL).

Learning online is a social process between learners and instructors, learners and the content of the course as well as learners and their peers. Successful online learning requires the learners to be familiar with different forms of engagement. Martin and Bolliger (2018) describe these online engagements as learner-to-content, learner-to-instructor, and learner-to-learner.

Hence, in order to qualify online engagement as social learning, Martin and Bolliger (2018) different forms of engagement fits perfectly into Bandura (1977) three conditions for social learning. Firstly, social learning requires the mediation of stimulus and response. Learners are given the stimulus in the form of the course content as well as the mode it is presented. If the presentation is positive, learners would respond positively to the learning process. Next, social learning also requires observational learning to take place. In online learning, learners observe the behaviour of the instructors via online and make decisions to model the behaviour and this modelling is a form of learning. Finally, social learning requires learning from the environment. There are two types of environment that learners can learn from. Before this, some learners may use online communication for non-academic matters. Online learning learning teaches learners to familairise online learning as an academic platform. Online communication also teaches learners to depend on their peers to facilitate their learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to investigate how social learning take place during online engagement. The instrument with 28 items is formulated from social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). An analysis using SPSS shows a Cronbach alpha Table 1 of .954 thus revealing a high reliability of the instrument used.

Table-1. Cronbach Alpha for the Instrument.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**No of Item**
.95428	28

Source: Bandura (1977); Martin and Bolliger (2018).

Data is collected from 433 students via a goggle form and analysed using SPSS version 26 to reveal the frequency in mean scores. Findings are presented in the form of bar charts.

4. FINDINGS

This section presents findings for answers to the research questions.

4.1. Findings for Stimulus & Response/ Learner-to-Content Engagement

In online learning, learners are given the content as stimulus to learn. Through activities that enhances engagement of learners with the content, learners will respond either positively or negatively. Negative stimulus will cause a negative response and vice versa.
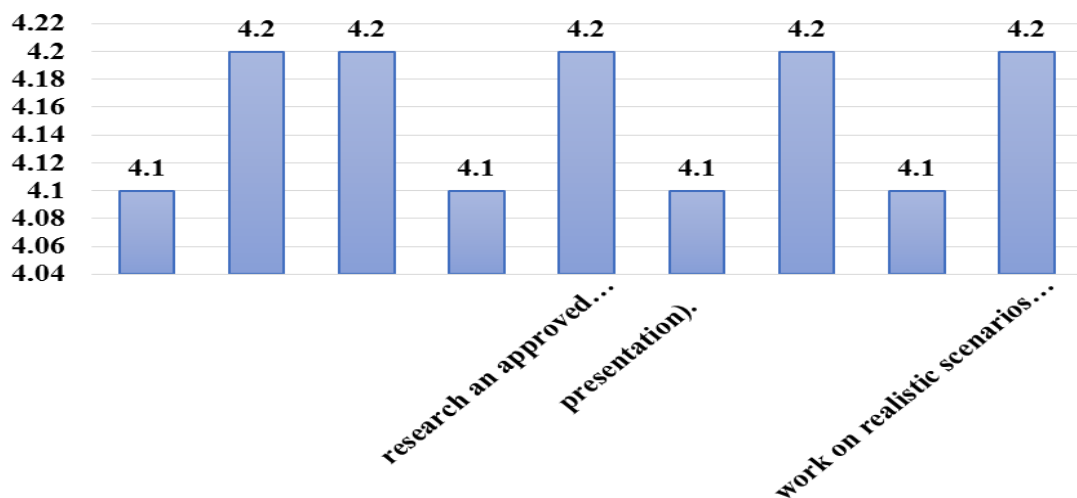

Figure-4. Learner-to-Learner Engagement

Source: Bandura (1977); Martin and Bolliger (2018).

Figure 4 presents the mean score for "learner to content". The highest mean score (4.2) is for "Interaction with content", "experience live", and also "synchronous web conferencing". There is also a high mean score for "research on approved topic of their choice", "given the opportunity to reflect", and also given self-tests to check understanding (4.2).

4.2. Findings for Learning from Observation/ Learner-to-Instructor Engagement

According to Bandura (1977) learning can take place when learners watch others and then they model what others do or say.
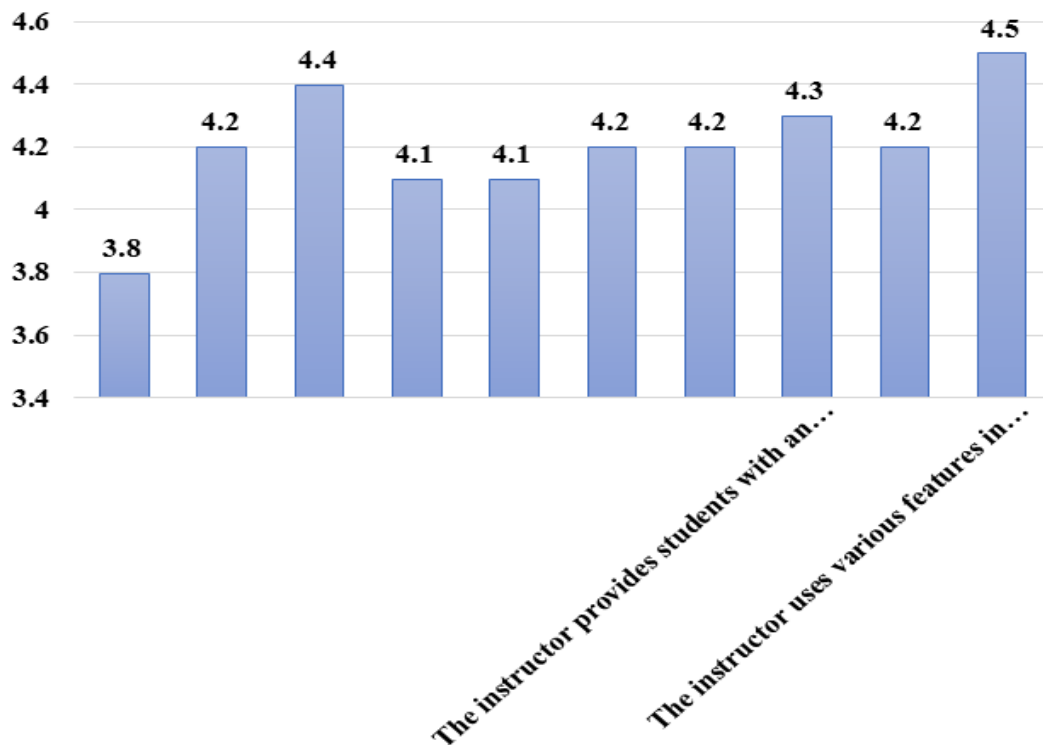

Figure-5. Findings for Learner-to-Instructor Engagement.
Source: Bandura (1977); Martin and Bolliger (2018).

Figure 5 shows the mean score for observational learning. This observational learning is a good foundation for learners to practice leaner-to-instructor engagement. Respondents reported that "the Instructor creates forum to contact them if they have any questions" (4.4), "instructor provides opportunity to reflect via journals /surveys", "instructor use various features in synchronous sessions to interact" (4.3). However, the leaners did not quite like to be "referred to by their names in the forum" (3.8) during the online class.

4.3. Findings for Learning from the Environment/ Learner-to-Learner Engagement

Bandura (1977) states that learning takes place within the context of the learners' environment. In the classroom setting, one of the main environment is the engagement that the learners with their peers.

Figure 6 presents the mean score for learner-to-learner engagement. Findings reveal that the "learners enjoyed to work collaboratively" (4.1), they "used large selection of materials" (4.1), and they "are able to moderate discussions" (4.0).
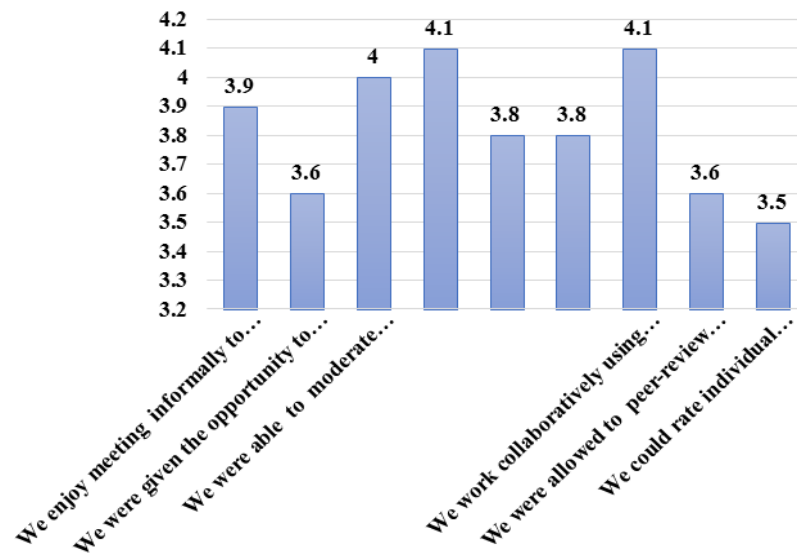
Figure-6. Findings for learner-to-learner engagement.
Source: Bandura (1977); Martin and Bolliger (2018).

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Findings and Discussion

5.1.1. Stimulus & Response

The content in the online course can be considered as the stimulus given to the learners. If the stimulus given is positive, there is a high chance that the response from learners will be positive. Positive stimulus in this sense is the content of the online learning. If learners can relate well to the content, they would have a positive outlook on the learning activities planned by the instructor. The study by Moore. and Iida (2010) also revealed that leaners reacted positively when they were able to look for various resources to support their learning content and they were able to various functions online to search for and understand the content.

5.2. Learning from Observation

Instructors are role models to learners-be it face-to-face or online. Learners looked up to instructors for them to imitate in one way or another. Findings in this study suggest that it is the instructors who needed to create opportunities for the learners to want to learn. Kabata et al. (2005) and Alqahtani and Rajkhan (2020) also reported that it is what the instructors do (or do not) during online classes that will create a positive (or negative) modelling behaviour to the learners. This is also reported by Itoh and Charles (2002) who found that students felt comfortable discussing with their peers online to prepare for exams.

5.3. Pedagogical Implications

This pandemic has accelerated the need to have classes online. Instructors have to teach in the new norm. They must not only polish their online management skills (Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020) in order to make their online classes effective. In addition to that Shabudin et al. (2014) suggested that instructors plan activities such as role play, question and answer, simulation, and so on via online. Many language activities that were successfully used face-to-face can now be modified to fit into online classes so learners can have positive experiences via online.

Within all types of programs, the latest trend in the higher education sector is to increasingly add more online course modules to courses. It is not clear whether students make full use of online components of courses and individual resources and whether they see these techniques as adding value to their teaching experience. On top of that, the reliability and validity of the model are explored with suggestions for future research. As Internet-based education continues to grow worldwide, this model may assist policymakers, faculty, students, and others in making reasonable and informed judgments about the quality of and learning in Internet-based distance education.

5.4. Suggestion for Future Research

Future research could look into learners' perspective of online learning. In addition to that, it is also suggested that in-depth studies to be carried out to explore the challenges faced by instructors teaching online as well as learners learning online.

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