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Cross-Border Chinese Online Class Amid The COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

From both interactionist and social-culture perspectives on second language acquisition (SLA), teacher-student's interactions provide opportunities for learning Chinese as a Second Language (CSL) which is considered a difficult language to learn by most foreign students. During this COVID-19 pandemic, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become much securer compared to human interactions. This research investigates three aims. 1) Explore the distinctions between the traditional classroom and online learning by different modes, 2) Examine the different methodologies of the teachers and their maneuvers in using CMC, and 3) Through qualitative analysis, analyze the challenges and prospects of online CSL classes. A mixed-method approach is adopted in that a) The multimodal interactions of 3 teachers and 84 students are recorded and analyzed quantitatively b) Through an interpretive evaluation of data gathered from questionnaires, evaluate teacher-student weekly class interactions during the study period.

Keywords: *COVID-19 pandemic; Chinese language (online-learning); computer-mediated communication (CMC), student's health, communication mode dominance (CMD).*

Introduction

Over the past few years, teaching and learning has seen a greater transition to online, and virtual learning environments (Ryan & Poole, 2019; Tseng, Liou, & Chu, 2020). There is a great potential in the promotion of second language learning and it is very valuable for students who aim at bridging geographical barriers. (T.-J. Lin, Wang, Grant, Chien, & Lan, 2014) Given the spread of COVID-19 across the world, teaching Chinese in classrooms to international students has been transformed into online teaching and learning. In spite of the desire to share and acquire knowledge, safety is paramount. In this regard, all learning, as well as teaching interactions are held online, thus; supported by technology. In this critical situation, only online classes have the assurance to protect students' and teachers' health and safety. However, in the view of Rebecca Barret-Fox, online classes are creating a worse impact on teaching methodology (Barrett, 2020). The idea of transferring what students do in a classroom to an online environment has its shortfalls. Holding and controlling these interactions (online classes) during a pandemic is another problem altogether.

During this pandemic, it is expected of university authorities and teachers to plan and schedule courses taking into consideration the scattered location of students and the also the time differences. The cloud-based Zoom app enables educational institutions to migrate from the traditional setups to virtual classes. The app is currently amongst the most used platforms for international students learning Chinese (Kamenetz & Morris, 2020).

This article focuses on the way Chinese teachers engage students in online classes and their teaching strategies amid the pandemic. There are three main aims of the study. First, this study explores the distinctions between the traditional classroom and online learning by different modes.

Secondly, due to the sudden spread of the virus, schools had to switch to online abruptly without training for teachers on how best to use these platforms. In view of this, we explore the different methodologies of teachers in using CMC modes, thus; audio, video and text modes. Also, this study assesses the participation of students in online classes.

Background of the research

This study is based on the sociocultural theory on second language teaching and learning (Qi & Lai, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). Language is a social construct and an individual's language should be recognized and understood by society (J. Xu, Li, & Curtis, 2015). Learning a language is an interpersonal communication process and also a social and interactive process (Yuan, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic is a health crisis not only in China but the entire world. Currently, all cities in China are strictly adhering to protocols to combat the cataclysm. Many educational institutions especially in developing economies have come to a halt. The crisis leaves decision-makers in the dilemma of closing schools or keeping them continued with the help of alternative web-resources. Teaching and learning is gradually shifting to online and is being embraced by all class of students including professionals who wish to further their education (Andersen & Nielsen, 2019). The current interruptions in the world's education system could have a long term effect (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020) as the education system's shift to online is likely to take years to perfect.

TBLT (Task-based language teaching), or TBL (Task-based learning) is an approach which makes use of practical tasks in the learning process. Thus, real-world scenarios are used as tasks for students to be assessed. TBL makes learning a language more practical (Ellis, 2003; Iizuka, 2019; Najjari, 2014; Richards, 2015; Samuda, 2008). These days, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become a much securer mode of human interaction especially within the education sectors (Cao & Lin, 2017; Coppolino Perfumi, Bagnoli, Caudek, & Guazzini, 2019; R. Hampel, 2006). Many institutions have diverted teaching activities to the use of modes such as web chat, audio, video, and web-conference (R. Hampel, & Stickler, U. , 2005; Satar, 2013).

Online teaching and learning have been considered a positive and prudent approach by all stakeholders during the pandemic as compared to the traditional (face to face) mode (C.-H. Lin, Zhang, & Zheng, 2017; Notaro & Diamond, 2018). Research into online teaching has made great progress over the years. However, the same cannot be said of CSL (Gong, Hu, & Lai, 2018; Li, 2014). Chinese institutions of higher learning have adopted online platforms to carry out an uninterrupted delivery of Chinese lessons to their international students some of whom returned to their various countries during the 2019 winter holidays and haven't returned to China due to the pandemic.

Language teaching in an online context

Classroom interaction is an effective way of learning language (Chen, 2020; Huang, Yang, Yang, & Yan, 2020; Malinovská & Ludíková, 2017; Yunxia., 2016) and most researches are channeled at teaching in class, thus; involving teachers and students present in a classroom. However, with the development of technology, teaching and learning online is gaining grounds. Over the past years, the use of online mediums in language teaching has seen a significant increase (Stockwell, 2010).

The internet as a mediator is causing a shift from the traditional "Teacher-Student" to a "Teacher- media-student" system. It facilitates education despite the separation of teachers and students in time and location. An interactive teaching through the use of a mediator however is more complex and difficult to achieve good results (R. Hampel, 2012).

In spite of the multiple interactive modes that online classes present, teaching online could be flexible but challenging (Jin et al., 2019; Welch & Napoleon, 2015). (Caskurlu, 2018; B. Xu, Chen, & Chen, 2020) point out the characteristics of teaching and learning of college English and prove explicit characterization of teacher-student online interactions. Online language teaching is achieving a remarkable success in improving the listening and speaking ability of students (Millar, Sahoo, Yamashita, & Cummins, 2020; Warren & Lester, 2020).

Chinese interaction online class

CSL has become popular in the world these days (Viberg & Grönlund, 2013). The challenges in teaching and learning Chinese also have been mentioned in various books, papers, and reports (He, Valcke, & Zhu, 2011; Tong & Tsung, 2020).

Students' satisfaction is an important factor, hence, a good learning environment and a close interaction with students to achieve this goal are paramount. As with any other language, effective interactions between learners-learners and learners-teachers are required to achieve maximum results. Certain aspects of Chinese such as Chinese Pinyin, grammar, characters, and tones make it unique and a complex. In this regard, learning Chinese needs more devotion and attentiveness, hence, teachers' interaction with students is a key. As put by (Gong et al., 2018), online teaching generally requires close interaction with students. This research is particularly noteworthy in the context of online teaching as it represents the experiences of foreign students who study Chinese in Chinese Universities during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Due to the nature of Chinese and the complexity of online learning, studies have not delivered adequate information on students' and teachers' interactions online sessions. (Guo & Möllering, 2016) implemented a task-based teaching in an online Chinese class and demonstrated how teachers and students apply different modes to learn and complete tasks in a web conference-based class. Our research similarly examines the interactions in online CSL classes with focus on the distinctive techniques applied by the instructors.

Research questions

Comparing traditional (face-to-face) teaching to online CSL classes, this study attempts to find the differences between these two modes and further analyze the interactivity of online classes during the COVID-19 outbreak.
This study focuses specifically on the following questions:

- What is the distinction between the traditional and online class by the various modes?

- What are the various methodologies employed by teachers in a CMC
- What are the challenges and prospects of online CLS classes?

Methodology

This study seeks to paint a complete view reflecting the learning of Chinese amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It further seeks to analyze the interaction process based on data and unearth challenges accompanying this mode of education. To achieve the research objective, qualitative and quantitative approaches are adopted. In the qualitative approach, interviews are conducted with a sample from the 84 students (ST) and 3 class teachers (T1, T2, and T3) by email and Zoom's intelligent conference. (Choomkong, Sirikunpitak, Darnsawasdi, & Yordkayhun, 2017; R. Hampel, & Stickler, U. , 2005; Khan, 2020; Kong & Khan, 2019; C.-H. Lin et al., 2017; Warren & Lester, 2020; Welch & Napoleon, 2015). Amongst others, we seek to find out from the respondents, what are the difficulties in an online class and their opinion on the two different modes.

Teaching and learning software

We adopt the Zoom Software as the learning platform for this study. This software has become a giant education platform and has been adopted by various online learning institutions especially during the COVID-19 pandemic due to its ability to enable synchronous video, audio, text chat, facilitate the use of PPTs during sessions and webinar capabilities. Zoom also permits application and desktop sharing and has meeting rooms and video recording amongst other features.

Research participants and data collection

The sample size consists of 3 groups of students made up of 28 students each, making a total of 84 students none of whom had had any exposure to Chinese as well as 3 Chinese teachers. Both teachers and students were selected from Jiangsu University in China. The courses are beginner Chinese courses comprising 39 classes and designed to last 13 weeks. Further, each class has a duration of 45 minutes. Out of the 84 students, 78 are aged 18 to 29. Each teacher handles a class of 28 students termed in this study as class A, B and C as shown in Table 1.

Classes	NS	Countries
Class A (T1)	28	Russia (9), Ghana (7), USA (2), Pakistan (5), Somalia (3), Egypt (2)
Class B (T2)	28	Ghana (15), Pakistan (3), Yemen (4), South Africa (5), Austria (1)
Class C (T3)	28	Middle East (6), Pakistan (5), India (8), USA (1), Australia (3), Ghana (5)
Total		84
Sources: Author computation. T1, T2 and T3 represent teachers 1-3 and NS stands for Number of students.		

Table 1: Number of students.

The course was scheduled to contain three phases. Table 2 presents the schedule-in weeks-and the tasks to be completed in each phase. three categories of phases were completed during the course period. The schedule of these phases is given below;

Phases	Schedule
Basic interactions tasks	1st – 5th week
Daily conversation	6th – 8th week
Professional level interactions	9th – 13th week

Table 2: Course phases and schedule.

In order to ensure that the 45 minutes allocated to each class receives the maximum usage. A set of predetermined stages or sequence of a class is established. Each of the three phases follow the same approach. Table 3 presents these stages and specific activities, allocated time and the mode of application, i.e. audio, video and / or text.

Stages	Activities	Time limits	Modes of applications
Pre-task	Warm-up activities	5 minutes	Audio/video/text
Main task	Main activities (lessons)	15 minutes	Audio/video/text
Reporting stage	Task presentation and class games	25 minutes	Audio/video/text

Table 3: Class stages and activities.

A greater part of the class is dedicated to practicing what had been taught for the day. This is to allow students familiarize themselves with the content of every lesson. This stage includes games formed from the day's lessons.

Research Technique

Each teacher's group of 28 students is further developed to create 4 groups (A[1]-D[1]) of 7 students each. In the end, 12 groups are thus obtained. A mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach is then applied on these groups in that; 1) each teacher's multimodal communications with students is recorded and analyzed quantitatively. 2) Qualitatively, the responses from the interviews are interpreted and analyzed.

Firstly, each teacher's interactions with the student groups are analyzed and interpreted for each mode. A further examination is done on the various strategies applied on these modes. Also, 15 to 20 minutes of structured interviews were conducted with 15 interviewees comprising12 students and the 3 teachers. The interviews used open-ended question in order to give more room for the respondents' comments.

Communication Modes

We create a tool which we refer to as the Communication Mode Dominance (CMD). By CMD, we refer to the frequency at which the various modes, thus; audio, video and texts are used in a session. We examined through our analysis, the CMD for both teachers and students. For this study, we assigned CMD 1 to audio and CMDs 2 and 3 to video and texts respectively. The CMD is measured and analyzed to determine the teachers' interaction with the students per each mode. The book; "Developing Chinese" was the main training material for the course. The concentration and participation of each student was measured by his/her overall speech ability (fluency level) through a weekly assessment.

Coding

In the qualitative approach, Open-ended questions were used to retrieve responses from the interviewees to construct a coding structure based on the major slots that emerge. We follow Colaizzi's method to assign codes to the interview responses. Through a careful reading of the 15-observations (interviews), we identify patterns and similarities of short phrases and words within the responses and make codes from them (Saldana, 2013).

Results and Discussions 5.1. Multimodal Interactions

The multimodal interface of Zoom permits students to opt to utilize one or a combination of modes to communicate with peers and teachers. For example, a student could choose to use video, audio, and texts at the same time to achieve any learning purpose. The instructors and the students' multimodal interactions for this study are quantitatively analyzed. The intention of this is to determine the frequency of use of these mode during the lessons.

CMD of each group

The CMD of both students and teachers were analyzed for the individual groups. The fluency of each student is measured by their ability to read the practice book. (Hua, 2011), The CMD's are presented graphically in Figs. 1,2,3, and 4. In Figs 1- 4, the groups (A-D) of every teacher containing 7 students each were further developed into groups of three students each. The making of this is described below;

First, the seven students of each group for every teacher is coded with numbers1-7. Next, students in the A group (for all 3 teachers) bearing "code 1" were put together to form ST1-3. Again, three students of A groups with "code 2" are also put together to form ST 4-6. The same is done for students bearing codes 3 to 7. The same technique is applied to groups B-D. We name this new groups; Groups A[1]-D[1]. In the end, we obtained 7 ST-groups each for A[1]-D[1] as shown in Table 4.

This was created to have a common smaller sample involving students from each teacher's class. The major advantage is that it enables us better measure teachers' performance using the average time spent on the smaller groups of students rather than measuring that of individual students. Figs 1-4 are the graphical representations of the information in Table 4.

Description	Group A[1]							Group Average
Students	ST1-3	ST4-6	ST7-9	ST10-12	ST13-15	ST16-18	ST19-21	
CMD 1 (Audio)	16	19	12	23	19	18	18	17.857
CMD2 (Video)	23	18	23	12	19	16	15	18.000
CMD3 (Text)	18	21	8	15	20	11	23	16.571
Teachers' involvement with students	27	23	27	29	24	29	28	26.714
Class total duration	45	45	45	45	45	45	45	45.000
Teaching duration per class	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30.000
Students' average (CMD 1,2,3)	19.00	19.33	14.33	16.67	19.33	15.00	18.67	17.476
Group B[1]								
Students	ST22-24	ST25-27	ST28-30	ST31-33	ST34-36	ST37-39	ST40-42	

CMD 1	8	20	17	23	11	14	20	16.143
CMD 2	23	8	21	22	12	23	8	16.714
CMD 3	19	13	8	23	10	17	18	15.429
Teachers' involvement with students	24	30	30	28	28	25	25	27.143
Student's average (CMD 1,2,3)	16.67	13.67	15.33	22.67	11.00	18.00	15.33	16.095
Group C[1]								
Students	ST43-45	ST46-48	ST49-51	ST52-54	ST55-57	ST58-59	ST60-63	
CMD 1	12	10	19	10	19	19	23	16.000
CMD 2	14	11	21	22	21	9	20	16.857
CMD 3	18	22	20	23	16	8	11	16.857
Teachers' involvement with students	30	30	28	26	26	27	24	27.286
Student's average (CMD 1,2,3)	14.67	14.33	20.00	18.33	18.67	12.00	18.00	16.571
Group D[1]								
Students	ST64-66	ST67-69	ST70-72	ST73-75	ST76-78	ST79-81	ST82-84	
CMD1	13	8	9	21	10	15	21	13.857
CMD2	8	11	13	19	23	15	20	15.571
CMD3	15	20	11	12	22	14	10	14.857
Teachers' involvements with students	28	26	26	24	24	28	30	26.571
Student's average (CMD 1,2,3)	12	13	11	17.33	18.33	14.67	17	14.762
Sources: Authors' computation. The average time was computed based on individual teacher's recorded minutes for each student.								

Table 4: Weekly Average CMD of the three teachers (in minutes). *Video dominance*

Throughout the lessons, only a small segment (18%, 16.71%, 16.85%, and 15.57% in groups A[1]- D[1] respectively) used webcams or mobile cameras (see CMD of Figs. 1,2,3, and 4).
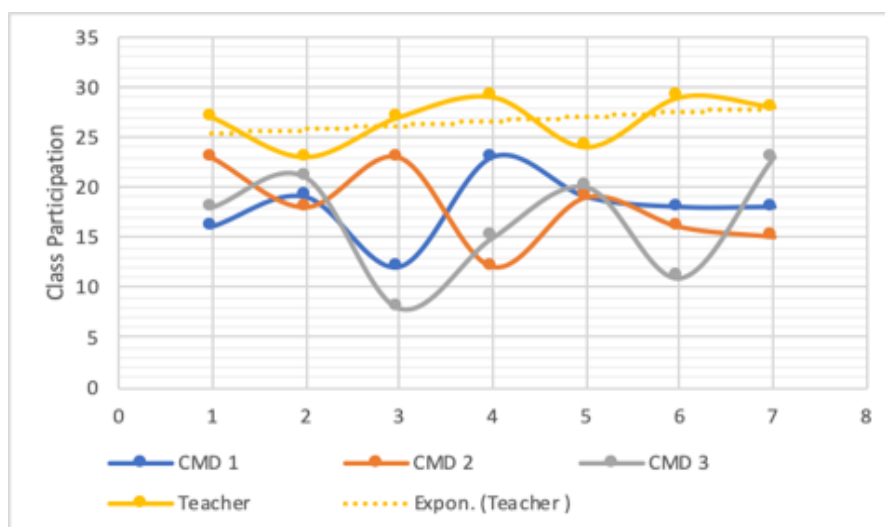

Figure 1: CMD-group A[1].

Whereas the teachers' webcams were remained turned on throughout the sessions, only two students maintained their webcams all the way through. The reason for this was revealed in the interviews conducted. Many students indicated that instability and the high-cost mobile data (internet) in their various countries could not permit them to use webcams during the lessons but rather rely on audio and texts.
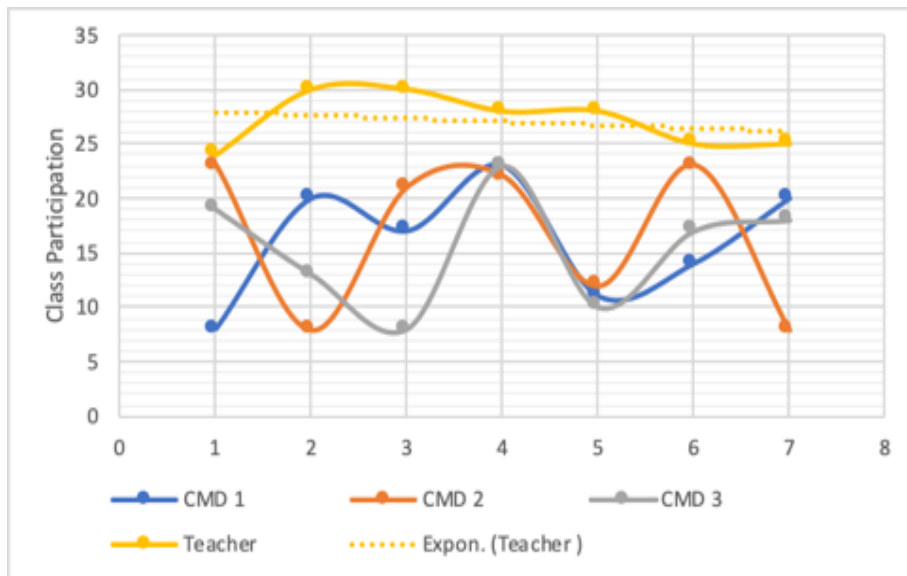

Figure 2: CMD-group B[1].

Average durations of 17.86, 18, and 16.57 minutes were recorded for CMD 1, 2, and 3 in ST1-21 (group A[1]). Whilst averages of 16.14, 16.71, and 15.43 in B[1]; 16, 16.86, and 16.86 in C[1] as well as 13.86, 15.57, 14.86 in D[1] were recorded for CMD 1, 2 and 3 (see table 3).
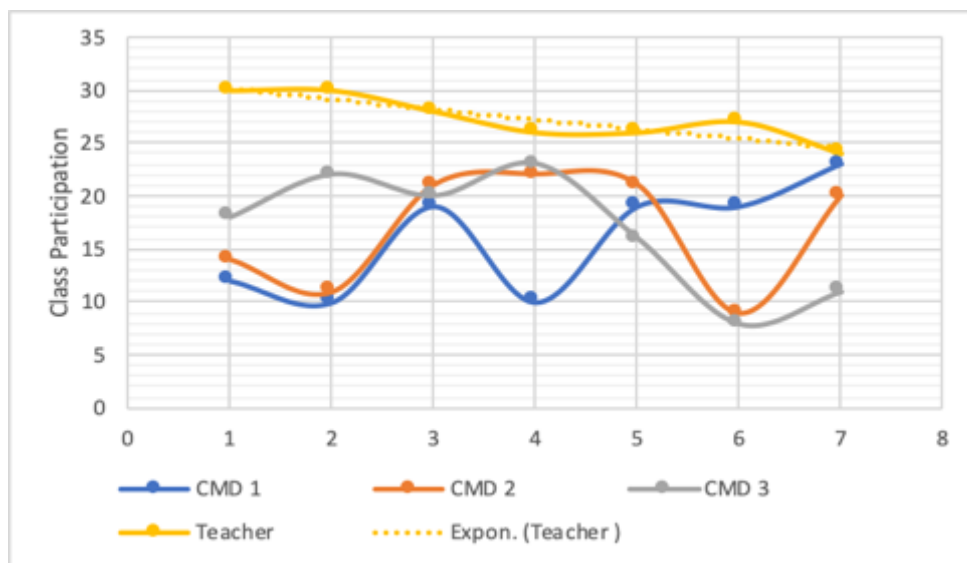

Figure 3: CMD-group C[1].

Amongst the four groups, the highest average of CMD1 and 2 was seen in group A[1], whilst that of CMD 3 was recorded in C[1]. The lowest in each CMD was seen in group D[1].
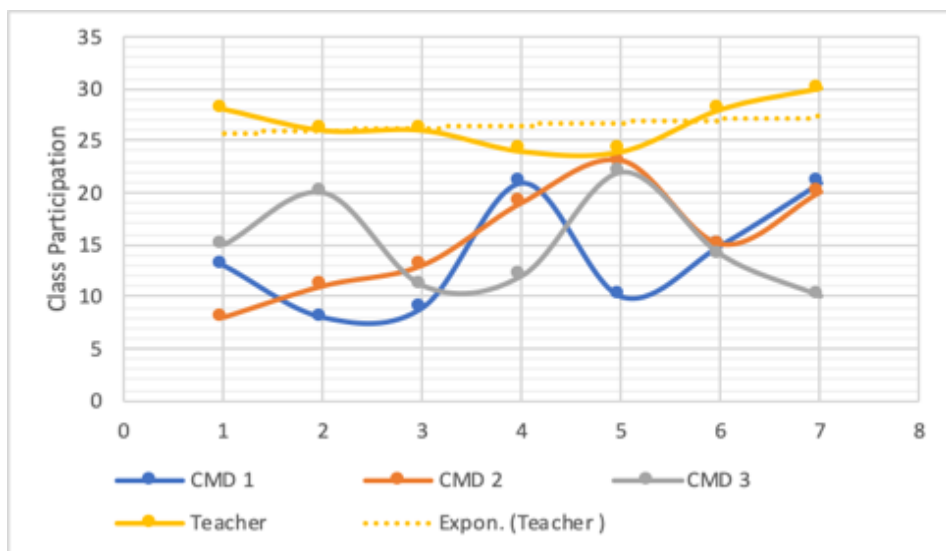
Figure 4: CMD-group D[1].

Table 5 shows each teacher's (T1-3) schedule in weeks 1, 2, and 3. Each teacher delivered three lectures per week with a maximum duration of each class being 45 minutes. The coordination of the teachers is expressed in minutes and seconds.

Teachers and weeks	Class		Group-Activities (ST)		Individual-Activity (T-ST)	
	ST	T-ST	Same	Different	Same	Different
T1-Week 1	14'45''	15'15''	4'25''	3'00''	3'20''	4'15''
T1-Week 2	16'34''	13'26''	3'30''	4'15''	2'00''	5'15''
T1-Week 3	11'55''	18'05''	1'15''	4'10''	5'05''	4'30''
T2-Week 1	5'41''	24'19''	6'40''	3'73''	1'22''	3'26''
T2-Week 2	11'21''	18'39''	0'20''	4'30''	5'05''	5'05''
T2-Week 3	8'31''	21'29''	3'30''	3'95''	3'12''	4'23''
T3-Week 1	7'05''	22'55''	4'45''	4'55''	2'15''	3'45''
T3-Week 2	10'25''	19'35''	1'75''	4'50''	4'19''	4'16''
T3-Week 3	4'06''	25'54''	7'95''	3'56''	0'25''	2'84''
Sources: Authors' computations. 'and'' represent minutes and seconds. ST=Student, T-ST= Teacher, and Student						

Table 5: Weekly learning activities.

The 45 minutes' class duration is categorized into three sessions (class, group, and individual activities). Class refers to the period during which teaching activities go on. This is further categorized into two parts; 1) the teacher asks students to review the previous lessons (ST), 2) the teacher introduces and teaches the topic for the day (T-ST).

15 minutes is dedicated to group and individual activities. It could be observed that all teachers dedicated ample time to every activity during the lessons. Both group and individual activities were structured in a way that allows for same and different tasks at various points in time.
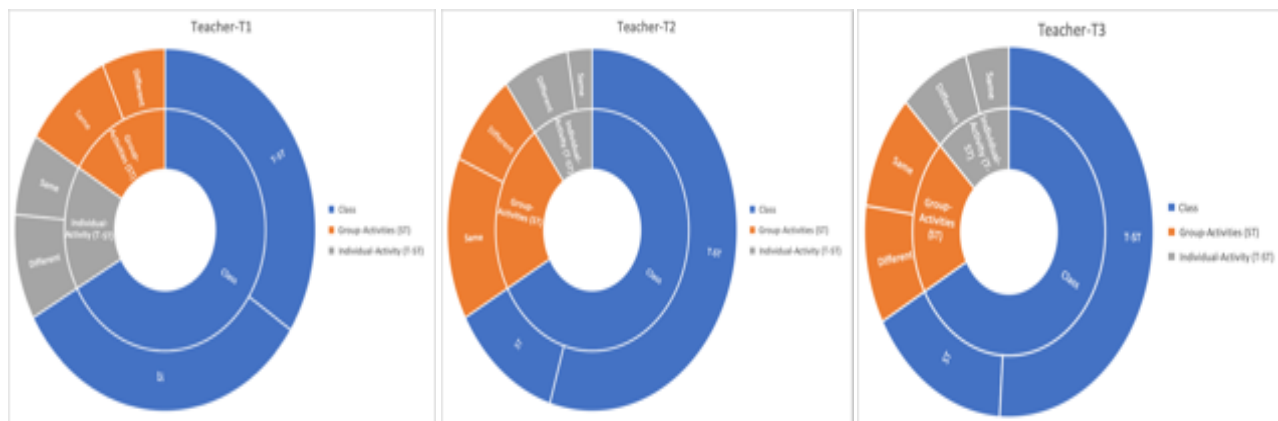
Figure 5: T1-T3.

The chart shows that group activities mostly require much time than individual activities. This could be due to the fact that members of the group would have to brainstorm before they conclude. Further, the chat indicates that group activities involving the same task take much time than group tasks with different tasks.

Another observation from Fig 5 is that teachers adopted various skills to interact with students. For instance, whilst T3 spent 7'43'' and 2'05'' on task-based practice and games respectively in week 1, T3 spent 5'45'' and 1'00'' on the same set of activities in the same week. Also, T3 spent 67.75% on mechanical practice and 5% of the class duration on games in week 1. It was further observed that T2 spent 30.05% on task base activity and 46.7% on the mechanical practice in the third week.

At the beginning of each class, teachers confirm the students' health status by inquiring whether the students have completed the online health check. The health check is an online questionnaire created by Jiangsu University to collect information daily from students on their health status. The CMC teaching methodology is more applicable for in-class activity (T-ST) as it enables teachers to adopt various teaching strategies in each class and involve students in different activities and tasks.

All teachers delivered the same lectures to the different groups of students. However, the execution of ST and T-ST activities in each session changed. Fig. 6 shows class, group, and individual activities in weeks 1, 2, and 3 of each teacher and the manner of the presentation, thus; either same or different activities. The graphs compare the class performance of the teachers, and also their various strategies employed during the weeks. For instance, T3 spent 25 minutes and 54 seconds (25'54'') on T-ST activities in week 3 whilst T1 with 13'26'' on the same activity in week 2.
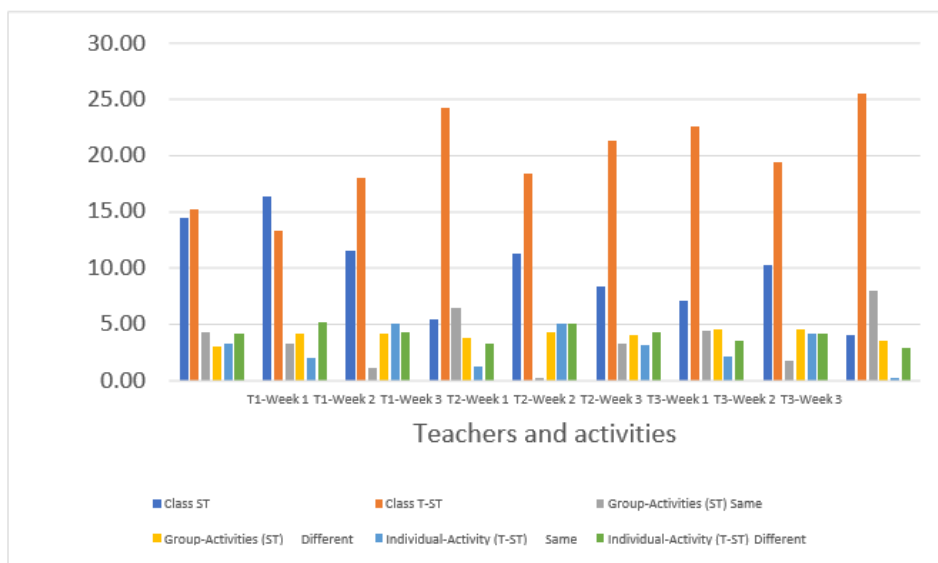

Figure 6: T-ST activities in weeks 1-3.

Due to the complexities in organizing in online classes, a greater percentage of the activities focused on the same task to ensure an effective monitoring by the teachers. Even though learning a new language needs much attention, CSL requires additional dedication from both students and students. Given this, teachers are expected to strategize and organize lessons to catch the attention students.

Interactive content of online classes

Online education platforms provide conducive platforms and tools to ensure that effective and efficient education is achieved. The synchronous type of online teaching adopted by Jiangsu University ensures that real time class experience is achieved. This type of system has a time bound system which demands students and teachers to be present at a particular time in order to commence a session. Table 6 shows the online class schedule of all three teachers in weeks 1-3. The complete online class for this study consists of a warm-up, teaching, practicing, and a wrap up activity.

Teachers and weeks	Pre-task (Warm up)		Main task (Teaching)			Practicing			Wrap up
	Call-att.	Daily-con	Words	Grammar	Text	Mechanical practice	Task-based Practice	Class games	Summarize homework
T1-Week 1	1'15''	3'45''	5'26''	4'18''	5'16''	10'24''	5'16''	4'20''	5'00''
T1-Week 2	2'00''	3'00''	8'25''	4'35''	2'00''	12'35''	5'25''	2'00''	5'00''
T1-Week 3	3'36''	1'24''	7'19''	4'21''	3'20''	9'34''	6'01''	4'25''	5'00''
T2-Week 1	2'45''	2'15''	8'24''	4'10''	2'26''	10'12''	7'43''	2'05''	5'00''
T2-Week 2	4'20''	0'40''	8'25''	4'20''	2'15''	13'11''	5'24''	1'25''	5'00''
T2-Week 3	3'20''	1'40''	10'00''	3'35''	1'25''	12'15''	5'45''	2'00''	5'00''
T3-Week 1	3'25''	1'35''	8'35''	5'17''	1'08''	13'55''	5'45''	1'00''	5'00''
T3-Week 2	1'45''	3'15''	5'30''	5'20''	4'10''	14'25''	3'10''	2'25''	5'00''
T3-Week 3	1'50''	3'10''	7'53''	4'52''	2'55''	10'11''	7'25''	2'24''	5'00''
Sources: Call-att. represents Calling of attendance, Daily-con represents daily conversation									

Table 6: Weekly class activities.

The weekly schedule presented above shows that the teachers allocated about 5' for warm-up activities. This period enables teachers to check attendance and engage students in a short conversation before the commencement of the day's activities. By so doing, the teachers can know about the daily lives and academic progress of the students.

Further, 15' was allocated to the main lessons for each class. The main task of the day had three sub-sessions. The teachers employed various skills to carry out their classes. It could be seen that T1 in week 1 dedicated 5'26'' to introducing new words whilst T2 in week 3 used 10'00'' for the same purpose. Teaching new words was observed to be more time demanding followed by grammar and text Fig 7. Twenty minutes (20') was allocated to the third stage of the classes. This period is used for practicing the day's lesson and involves task-based activities and games.
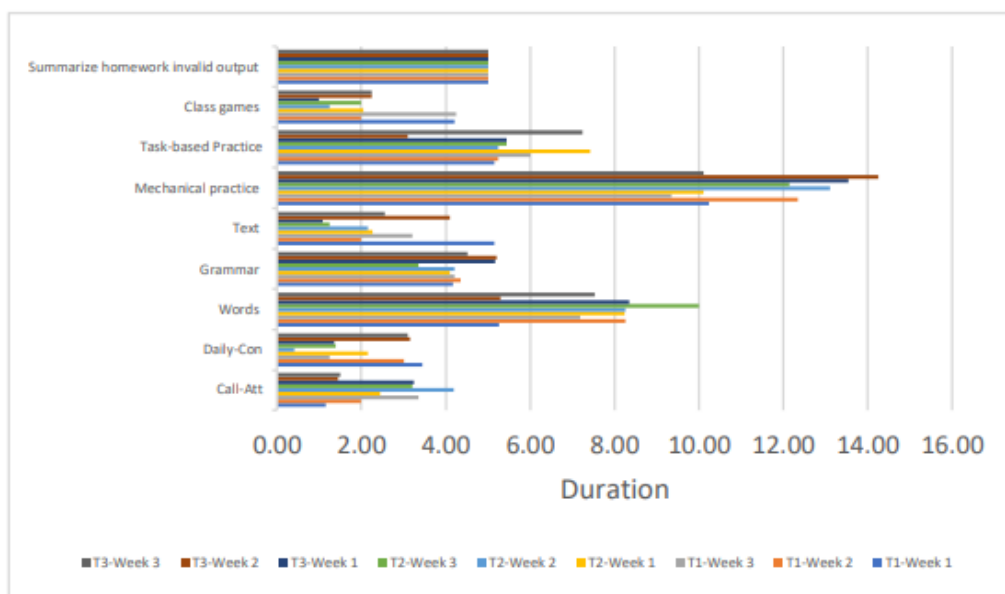

Figure 7: Weekly class activities.

A greater part of the time in this stage is spent on Mechanical practices because CMC's limitations in terms of human interactions make its class games not as interesting as in a traditional class. The final 5' of the class is used to wrap up the day's lesson and summarize homework.

Training of language skills

The skill of speaking is highly significant in CSL. It is found that speaking skills always synchronizes with other skills. First, we could see from the three classes of T1, T2, and T3, that writing skill was not emphasized as teachers only spend a maximum of 5' to teach some Chinese characters (texts) [Table 6]. Reading applies to vocabulary (words) and text. Either a teacher or student leads the reading activity followed by related questions. Improving speaking skills is the most demanding of all no matter the mode of class delivery, thus; online or offline. During the study period, T1 played listening materials (audio recordings) whilst the other teachers improved students' listening through speaking.

Network stability

The response from 11 interviews (73.3%) indicated that network stability is a requisite for CMC. Both teachers and students indicated that a lot of time was spent on technical issues (i.e. internet) before or even during classes. This left teacher with no option than to adjust the learning content. The interviews again revealed that efficiency could therefore not be achieved for students in areas with poor connectivity. Importantly, although teachers and students could interact with each other via Zoom's intelligent functions such as raising hands and sharing stickers, teachers were unable to see every student at the same time, affecting teachers' intent to give students equal attention. Further, teachers couldn't observe the overall appearance of students during the online classes making it's very difficult for teachers to observe facial expressions and degree of attentiveness among others. It was generally notable that not only teachers but also students had a positive attitude as most students indicated that the internet and other issues had little influence on their studies.

Recommendation

The above data analyses suggest that holding a successful online class by CMC is a great challenge. Most students outside China did not receive training on the use of the platform before the commencement of the class mostly due to network issues. Such students needed time to familiarize themselves with the new class environment. This situation was a potential source of resistance psychology as it could have lead students to finding interest in other things instead of online classes.

Teachers, playing the role of leaders during classes are expected to know the expectations of the class and reduce students' anxiety. Teachers must therefore, receive enough training on teaching software and online teaching practices so that they can better handle any problems that may arise

during classes. This will save time and improve interaction efficiency.

Another challenge during an online class is how to improve the quality of interaction. Teaching CLS to beginner foreign students online requires different methods from the traditional classroom. Teachers must therefore modify and adopt the most dynamic and attractive ways to gain their attention whilst delivering lectures. In most cases, both teachers and students tend to choose the "avoidance strategy" when a misunderstanding arises. A text alternatively to the audio channel could be used where a word could be an appropriate answer to a question. In the situation where there are no recordings (archives) of previous lessons, it is important to give students an opportunity for extra lessons if need be. This will allow students who for some reasons (internet and others) did understand a topic or lesson to make up before the exams.

Also, a group meeting is a good avenue for students to communicate. Teachers can set a topic or different topics for each group with limited sentences or dialogues for each student. In this way, the students become conscious of the individual or collective goal and work at it. Whilst the discussion is ongoing amongst students, teachers should join each group frequently for supervision and remind group members to communicate in Chinese as much as possible.

Moreover, the modern enterprise video communication by Zoom is a reliable cloud-platform for audio, video, chat, and webinars across mobile handsets. The recording function in Zoom allows teachers and students to keep records of taught courses for future review. It is recommended that teachers gather enough materials to enable them best deliver in online classes. Students should also not rely on PPT's and audio materials but are encouraged to practice by speaking the Chinese language even after classes.

Limitations

This study is limited to the Zoom online platform and data from 84 students and 3 teachers of Jiangsu University, China. Data on 3 out of the 13 weeks of lessons was used in our analyses. It would be much universal for a wider range. Importantly, online class plays different roles on different Chinese proficiency level students. This study only focused on the beginner CSL students and presents a good basis for future exploration.

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