

Bare Minimum Online Class:

A Study of Online Learning Implementation in LPK Mulia Meisou Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of COVID-19 in Indonesia brings larger-scale social restriction, impacting educational institutes in carrying learning activities. Recent trends in Japanese language learning research in vocational training institutes lean toward the learning style before the pandemic, which is heavily oriented to support face-to-face meetings. Topic about how vocational training institutes conduct learning activities as an adjustment to the pandemic is not yet broadly examined. This article aims to examine the implementation of Japanese Language online learning for the engineers in a vocational training institute LPK Mulia Meisou Indonesia Bandung (LPK MMI), which focuses on 1) how online learning is being implemented in this institute and 2) how the students respond the implementation of this online learning. Through the teacher's note and student's survey from LPK MMI's Engineer Special Class. The findings showed that it was possible to establish a simple online learning management system and implement synchronous and asynchronous learning by utilizing the bare minimum application and free platforms such as LINE, Whatsapp, and Google Classroom. The students perceived that utilizing those applications as online learning tools was somewhat sufficient to help them study at home. There was interest in alternative applications such as Zoom, Google Meet, Wideboard, or Microsoft Teams to be implemented as online learning tools. However, there were also concerns regarding these tools to be useful when the cellular signal was unstable and cellular data also limited. Thus, utilizing the most common application for both students and teachers and utilizing the free platform could be a good option for conducting online learning for those who have limited resources.

Keywords: *Japanese Language, Online Learning, Vocational Training Institute*

1. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 in Indonesia and the implementation of larger-scale social restriction changed how educational institute carries their learning activities. Institutions are forced to change from conventional methods of teaching to online learning rapidly. LPK Mulia Meisou Indonesia (LPK MMI) is one among various institute who face the challenge of changing the way of carrying learning activities

Before the pandemic, learning activities were done in conventional methods. In this institute, learning activities leaned heavily upon face-to-face meetings and did not include online learning. The implementation of larger-scale social restrictions made this method impossible, and the institution had to implement online learning.

As a contract-bound and time-limited training institute, not carrying learning activities is problematic for various reasons: 1) the institute does not have an established online learning management system; thus,

they must have online learning devices, 2) the institution does not have previous experience implementing online learning and has to learn quickly, adapt, and establish an online learning management system, 3) the institution has to fast-educate and familiarize the students to utilize the online learning management system in a short time, 4) the institution has to compromise when the student has limited abilities in terms of online learning enabled device, 5) the institution must fulfill qualification demands by job order (contracts given by the employment company) as a training result in limited time and resources.

Studies regarding online learning in Japanese Language in general, as well as studies regarding Japanese Language Learning in vocational training institutes in Indonesia, have been brought up in recent years [9], [16], [17], [19], [15], [4], [13], [18], [7], [10], [3]. Nevertheless, the implementation of online learning at vocational training institutes to adjust to the pandemic is not being brought up yet. Hence, this situation creates

a gap in the field. This article explores the implementation of online learning in an institute that previously leans heavily upon facet-to-face meetings, focusing on how a bare minimum of online learning is being implemented in LPK MMI and its response to its implementation of this method of online learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocational Training Institute, or in Bahasa Indonesia, called Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja (LPK), is an entity that falls under the auspices of the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower. Based on the Minister of Manpower Regulation No. 17 of 2016, LPK is a government agency, legal entity, or individual who meets the requirements to provide job training. The term 'job training' (or 'Pelatihan Kerja') refers to all activities to provide, obtain, improve, and develop work competence, productivity, discipline, attitudes, and work ethic at a particular skill and expertise level position or job. Job training focuses on mastering knowledge, skills, and attitudes following established workplace standards and requirements [12].

Based on this definition, it is clear that Japanese language learning in LPK has different characteristics from learning Japanese in formal schools because it is oriented towards mastering knowledge and skills tailored to the workplace's needs. One of the knowledge and skills needed to work in Japan is the knowledge and skills in the Japanese language. Teaching and learning Japanese at LPK has its challenges, because in general, the learning period is not long, only around three to six months. Meanwhile, on average, the trainees have no previous background knowledge of Japanese. It means that the trainees need to learn Japanese from scratch quickly until they have sufficient working experience in Japan. These qualifications can generally be different based on job orders from employment companies in Japan [8].

This paper's focus lies in implementing online learning for the Japanese language in LPK, so it is appropriate to address online learning. What is online learning? The questions have been asked since the emergence of online learning, which has started more than a decade ago, and become a trend in recent years [6], [14], [2]. In brief, all educational activities that take place over the internet can be described as online learning. Allen and Seaman [1] stated that in online learning, most or all of the course content is delivered online, and typically have no face-to-face meetings. In this paper, the term of online learning uses the definition provided by Allen and Seaman since the definition is most appropriate in describing education activities held in LPK Mulia Meisou Indonesia Bandung (LPK MMI).

Bates [5] used the term 'classroom-type online learning' to describe online learning that emulates classroom-type activities. In this type of online learning, software that enables teachers and students to conduct learning activities in a protected environment is utilized. This software is the so-called Learning Management System (LMS). Usually, the LMS design is an exact replication of the classroom design model, allowing

teachers to have scheduled learning (daily, weekly, or monthly), selecting and presenting learning materials to all students in the class at the same time. LMS also provides online discussion opportunities, enabling students to work through the materials at roughly the same pace, and the same software can hold assessment. The minus point of this LMS is that the online discussion is mainly asynchronous rather than synchronous. Google Classroom is one of the examples of this type of LMS. The background of online learning implementation in LPK MMI is the need to create a classroom-like environment in the distance-learning situation so that utilizing LMS is considered appropriate to meet these needs.

The term synchronous and asynchronous learning is part of online learning activities. Hrastinski [11] defined asynchronous e-learning as an activity commonly facilitated by media such as emails, discussion boards, and usually, the participants (teacher or student) do not online at the same time. Meanwhile, synchronous e-learning is online learning activities supported by media that enable both teacher and student to communicate in real-time, for example, by utilizing the video conference apps or chat apps. Both synchronous and asynchronous learning have their benefits in online learning. As Hratinski stated, synchronous learning increases engagement and students' motivation in learning activities, while asynchronous learning increases students' ability to process information provided throughout the learning process. LMS's limitations, which are mostly asynchronous, must be addressed so that learning activities become interactive, and the students can feel the social presence in being in a real-world classroom, although they are studying online. Hence, utilizing software that meets the need for synchronous and asynchronous sessions is necessary. Therefore, in LPK MMI, online learning activities are being held by utilizing more than one software (apps) to meet those needs.

Studies regarding online learning in the Japanese language in general and Japanese language learning in vocational training institutes have attracted many researchers to research this matter. Various researchers have discussed online learning in Japanese Language learning implementation, as mentioned in the article [9], [16], [17], [19]. From the articles, it is possible to utilize e-learning as a substitute for learning activities. However, the articles also mentioned problems regarding e-learning. On the technical side, technical glitches, the stability of internet connection, the device readiness to support the implementation of e-learning were the common problems. Meanwhile, on the human side, adjusting, familiarizing, and operating the LMS interface for both the lecturers and the student and maintaining the students' satisfaction levels with the e-learning process were examples of the problems that need to be addressed [16]—[17].

The studies mentioned above have given some insight into online learning in Japanese language classes. From the summary, it is clear that online learning in Japanese language learning is not a recent trend. However, the

research mainly focuses on implementing online learning in formal schools. In the research mentioned above, the institution that generally applied online learning was not necessarily an educational institute oriented towards job training.

Research regarding Japanese language learning focusing on how Japanese language learning brought up in vocational training institute only still focused on how the learning process was conducted in conventional methods, as seen in the articles [15], [4], [13], [18], [7], [10], [3]. Those studies mainly focused on strategies and teaching methods and the development of teaching materials specified for LPK. The research trends mentioned above reflected the learning style before the pandemic, which was heavily oriented to support face-to-face meetings. However, as the global pandemic occurred, carrying language learning, especially in LPK, was drastically changed. Although online learning in Japanese language learning is not a recent trend, it is a new trend for some educational institutes such as vocational training institutes. Hence, exploring online learning in an institute that previously leans heavily upon face-to-face meetings is necessary.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data in this research were compiled from respondents, consisted of teachers and students from LPK MMI's Engineer Special Class, with ten respondents. The data gathered from April 3rd to May 30th, 2020. Background in choosing the data compilation period was the timeline in which the lesson has reached the N3 subject (learning goals of the Engineer's class). Another consideration was that April and May were crucial for LPK MMI, as they started the online class. This first month of online learning was the basis for the following months' activities.

The data were compiled by utilizing two instruments: the teacher's meeting note and an online questionnaire. The teacher's meeting note is for gathering information on the implementation of online learning. In this study, the data collected from five meeting note documents. Information on student's responses to online learning implementation gathered from an online questionnaire. The online questionnaire consisted of 16 questions in multiple formats. The questionnaire implemented multiple-choice questions (multiple-choice and checkboxes), scaled questions (using five points Likert Scale), and open-ended questions (long answer text). The questionnaires focused on these points: 1) online learning duration: daily learning duration, days of study, student's opinion on ideal online learning duration; 2) learning materials: student's opinion on asynchronous learning materials, student's opinion on the ideal time to upload learning materials, preferred file formats learning materials, 3) learning activity: the preferred activity of learning, satisfactory levels of online class activities, problems commonly arise in the online class, 4) learning media: opinion on the type of media/platform used in synchronous and asynchronous learning sessions,

alternative media/platform suggestions for online learning. The compiled data would then be divided into two major categories according to this research's core issue: 1) online learning implementation in LPK MMI, 2) student's responses to the implementation of this online learning.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Implementation of Online Learning in LPK MMI

LPK MMI's Engineer Class is a specialized class where students' numbers, learning systems, and skill qualifications differ from other LPK MMI classes. It is a small class with seven students, which is the learning outcome is students to have language skills equal to the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N3 level. This requirement was set based on the job order from employment companies in Japan. The first three months' learning materials were equivalent to N5 and N4 level, and the N3 level of study materials starting in the fourth month. This process coincided with the transition from face-to-face meetings to online classes.

While the learning materials in the previous period were not made based on the JLPT test subject, the basis for learning materials in the fourth month was the JLPT test subject: letters and vocabulary (*moji-goi*), grammar and reading (*bunpo-dokkai*), also listening and conversation (*choukai-kaiwa*). This decision is the conclusion from the teacher's meeting held in early April. In this meeting, the teachers decided that the learning session would be held six days a week, from Monday to Saturday, for the engineer class. The study sessions were from Monday to Friday. There were also daily feedback sessions (daily test), and Saturday would be used to do JLPT try-outs.

Online class duration was two hours for the main subject (*moji, goi, bunpou, dokkai, choukai, or kaiwa*) and two hours of *shitsumon-jikan* (in-depth Q&A session about the main subject, or a discussion about the test and try-out results). The study session was both synchronous and asynchronous. The asynchronous session utilized a discussion board on Google Classroom, and the synchronous session utilized the WhatsApp group chat or LINE group chat. This software is free and familiar to both students and teachers, so they agreed to utilize the three software in learning activities. Also, the students and teacher did not require to create a separate account for utilizing these apps. Hopefully, in this way, starting up a learning management system would be faster and the time needed to adapt and familiarising the apps and platforms would be short.

In the online environment, there were certain rituals taken from face-to-face meetings to online classes. One of those rituals was doing *aisatsu* and attendance reports at the beginning of the study session, after the lunch break, and before ending the study session. It was a habit that became a standard in all of LPK MMI's classes and practices since the beginning of the program. In the

online environment, doing *aisatsu* and giving attendance reports was a way of conditioning the students to maintain the study atmosphere to feel like they were in a classroom. Hence, regular synchronous study sessions were opened with students doing *aisatsu*, followed by an attendance report.

Learning sessions in a synchronous session was not done by lecturing activity. Instead, in the learning session, teachers and students chatted about subjects, and it was uploaded to Google Classroom in the discussion style.

There were two ways to do a discussion activity; the first one was that the students would ask about the study topic as a whole, followed by the *sensei*'s answers. The second one was that *sensei* would give questions regarding the topic to the students. The chatting activity was intended to build an ongoing discussion by chatting while building engagement and social presence in an online environment. Another alternative activity in a synchronous study session was using a group voice call via LINE or WhatsApp applications. Synchronous sessions via video calls were infrequent due to the instability of cellular signal strength and limited cellular data package. The synchronous session duration was two to three hours. Furthermore, at the end of the session, a test was held to examine the student's comprehension of the subject.

The test duration was based on test subject coverage and the number of questions given for each test. Test duration also followed the standard of the JLPT test. Choosing a test duration based on the JLPT standard ensured that the students familiarized themselves with the JLPT standard. Test questions were taken from the reference book *Nihongo Soumatome N3*. At the end of each synchronous session, the test was held by either assigning quiz in the group chat or uploading a scheduled test via *Google Classroom*. Teachers specified when the test was available to be accessed and the limit to upload the answer.

The asynchronous study session was held via Google Classroom by uploading learning materials and uploading student assignments. Learning materials were uploaded to Google Classroom or WhatsApp group one or two days before the online study session. The asynchronous session was also utilized to do the daily test and do the JLPT try-outs.

4.2 Student's Response on Implementation of Online Learning in LPK MMI

The online class for the engineer class began in April. Evaluation of this online learning process was done after a month to compile data from the students regarding the process. The following information was gathered from the answers given by the students on the questionnaire.

4.2.1. Response on study duration

The daily online class study consisted of two sessions; those studied material discussion sessions for two hours and *shitsumon jikan* session, which was not set explicitly

as a follow up of the main discussion. In the beginning, the idea of the teacher's role in the *shitsumon jikan* session was present for answering questions from the students or providing feedback for the test result. However, often the main discussion session was extended to 4 hours. The extended hours of main discussion sessions were consistent with students' questionnaire responses, stating that interaction with the teacher, answering and discussing questions lasted for more than three hours. The student's opinions on ideal synchronous study duration based on the online questionnaire's answer showed that most students considered the ideal synchronous study duration was 3 hours.

4.2.2. Response to learning materials

The majority of the students said that it was helpful to have the feedback and learning material uploaded to Google Classroom for their self-study process at home. Most students perceived that the learning materials consisted of study explanation videos, practice videos, PDF files, and practice/ quiz on google form to help self-study at home. Furthermore, all of the students agreed that the learning material should be uploaded before the synchronous study session. As for the ideal time for uploading asynchronous learning material, most students preferred the material to be uploaded two days prior. However, there was an alternative opinion from students who preferred the learning materials to be uploaded one day, three days, even three days before a synchronous study session.

Preferred formats for learning materials formats to be uploaded to Google Classroom consisted of PDF, PowerPoint Slides (PPT), and video formats. Moreover, in the follow-up question, the reasons regarding their preference for choosing such formats were: practical, easy to understand, and cellular data saving (for non-video materials). For video materials, the students preferred it due to simplicity to hear a verbal explanation, and they could understand more from verbal explanation.

The students preferred Google Classroom as a materials sharing platform for sharing platforms for learning materials, and LINE was the most undesirable sharing platform. Another opinion regarding the sharing platform was that the students had no problem with any platform as long as they could receive easily accessible materials and easily understandable materials. Google Classroom was preferred because the files were accessible by PC and by phone without being downloaded first; additionally, the study materials in *Google Classroom* could be organized by subject type. Also, another opinion preferred a single application so that the materials would be easier to organize.

4.2.3. Response to learning activities

The majority of the students felt satisfied with online class activities. The preferred learning activities are: 1) reading the materials uploaded on Classroom followed by a discussion on WhatsApp/LINE chat, 2) reading the

materials uploaded on Classroom followed by a discussion on Whatsapp/LINE voice call, 3) discussing practice/test result via Whatsapp/LINE chat, 4) discussing practice/test result via Whatsapp/LINE voice call, 5) live practice session or Q&A session on Whatsapp/LINE chat, 6) live practice session or Q&A session on Whatsapp/LINE voice call, 7) Practice session on Google Form and 8) reading the materials uploaded on Classroom followed by a discussion on Classroom.

The activity that was considered to be the most useful to be practiced in the synchronous study session was the voice call. The students chose it as the most useful activity because it was easier to understand a verbal explanation. There was no time gap between questions and answers; therefore, it was more effective. Moreover, a voice call was more reliable than a video call in an unstable cellular network. A chat was less preferred because a long time was needed to type the messages, dragging on the questions' discussion. A video call session was preferred on a specific subject and preferably held for only two hours.

4.2.4. Response to learning media/platform

Most of the students considered Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and LINE to help them self-study at home. However, the usage of the software was only rated as "somewhat sufficient." The students proposed additional programs to be used, such as Zoom, Google Meet, Wideboard, and Microsoft Teams, because the students wanted more intensive study sessions and more secure software. Moreover, these applications were considered to be a popular application used in an online meeting. However, the application that was considered to be the most familiar and most comfortable to use in study sessions was WhatsApp, especially for a voice call/video call activity.

4.2.5. Common problems during online class

The sudden implementation of online learning brought problems not only at the stage of system initiation and the familiarisation of the learning management system. Even after the system started, some technical issues needed to be addressed. According to the questionnaire's answers, the common issues were: 1) limited cellular data package, 2) unstable cellular signal strength, 3) limited data package and unstable signal strength was considered a time-consuming matter that reduced the time for the synchronous study session.

The instability of cellular signal was mainly an obstacle during video calls and sometimes in voice calls. In the end, both student and teacher agreed to utilize chat as a synchronous study session for the study sessions could be held smoothly without delay.

5. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The online learning for the engineers in LPK MMI was classroom-type online learning, by utilizing three

platforms: Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and LINE apps. The learning schedule was designed by mimicking the offline schedule, but the learning hours were reduced. Learning activities were held in both synchronous and asynchronous way. WhatsApp and LINE were utilized to carry synchronous sessions through group chat, voice calls, or video calls. Google Classroom was utilized to perform asynchronous learning, mainly to upload study materials and conduct tests and quizzes.

The students perceived that utilizing the most familiar and easy-to-use applications was sufficient to help them study at home. They felt somewhat satisfied with how online learning was being implemented, although some materials were being given, and learning hours needed improvement. There was interest in using alternative applications such as Zoom, Google Meet, Wideboard, or Microsoft Teams as online learning tools, but there were also concerned regarding these tools to be useful when there was a limitation in cellular signals and cellular data.

6. CONCLUSION

This article's conclusion showed that utilizing bare minimum applications such as Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and LINE as an online learning management system is possible and sufficiently met students' needs. In an institution that previously leans heavily upon face-to-face meetings and only have limited resources, utilizing bare minimum application that is common for both students and teachers could be a good option. However, as LPK MMI Engineer Class was a small language class consisting of only seven students, the applicability of these minimum applications for larger-scale classes needed to be examined further.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the study participants for data collection and reviewers for their helpful comments.

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