HOW THE CHANGE TO ONLINE LEARNING AFFECTED CHINESE

LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS DUE TO THE 2020

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By

Jing Ren

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Committee Membership

Dr. Tom Cook, Committee Chair

Dr. John Lee, Committee Member

Dr. Elizabeth Miller, Program Graduate Coordinator

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Abstract

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This research study investigates how Chinese language teachers in California made the change from in-person learning to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, how they set up and taught virtual classes and what their reactions were to the online transitions. Teachers utilized various interactive tools and strategies to teach students in their virtual classrooms. Parental involvement with the child's education at home increased. Some public school district polices caused greater reductions in student participation than others. Teachers applied various communication strategies to engage students in creative ways while teaching online. This together with curriculum development and assessment design required that teachers adapt them to the new teaching environment. Teachers' reactions toward the transition are described in this research. Some expressed it as difficult, others mentioned it as easy. Teachers indicated that students' participation rates changed during the transition. This research used a questionnaire and one-on-one interviews to understand how Chinese language teachers switched from in-person classes to online learning. A link to the online survey was sent to K-16 Chinese language teachers in California. The one-on-one interviews were conducted on Zoom. One-hundred-sixteen teachers participated in the study. One-

hundred-sixteen questionnaires were collected and twenty in-depth interviews were

conducted.

Key Words: COVID-19 pandemic, stay-at-home order, Chinese language teaching,

transition to online education, teacher-student connections, pandemic stress, parental

involvement, social-emotional factors

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Introduction

From the beginning of March 2020, schools were required to follow California's "Stay-at-Home" order. This required students and teachers to transition to online teaching and learning at a short notice. As a result, they had to use desktop computers, laptops, tablet computers or smartphones in order to switch to online learning. Everyone had to adapt to online teaching and learning at short notice. Students had to access their online curriculum and learn to do more independent work. Teachers had to grapple with how to motivate students, how to use online technology to deliver their lessons, how to communicate with parents in order to involve them in their children's online education at home, and how to assess students' work at a distance.

This research investigated how Chinese language teachers transitioned from in-person teaching to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. One-hundred-sixteen Chinese language teachers in California participated in the study. One-hundred-sixteen teacher questionnaires were collected and twenty teachers were interviewed. The interviews lasted for twenty to forty minutes a piece. It is hoped this research will help educators evaluate more effective ways to support online language teaching. It provides suggestions for teachers to help improve students' language learning in different ways while they study at home. It is possible that suggestions from the research could be used to create various interventions, such as ways to group children in the classroom and at home, so that effective Chinese language teaching and learning may continue.

Different groups of teachers reported various perspectives regarding distance teaching and learning. For instance, this included teachers who had a view that took into consideration affective factors, teachers who used communicative approaches to language learning, and teachers who had a more traditional transmission model of learning.

The study also investigated whether students-teacher connections and parental involvement were significant factors in the transition to the virtual classrooms. Examples of practices that contributed to good student-teacher connections were how teachers checked in with students' personal and emotional concerns and how teachers reacted to the higher levels of stress exhibited by students that the teachers witnessed in their virtual classrooms. Some teachers used strategies that successfully reduced students' stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of parental involvement was an important contributor to the success of their children's transition to the virtual classroom.

Teachers expressed their opinions about their students' different levels of classroom engagement in learning in their distance classes, as opposed to their in-person classes. For example, in most cases, the school in-person classroom provided fewer distractions than what students experienced at home. However, some teachers reported the opposite effect for students with ADHD, who were more easily distracted by their classmates at school.

Literature Review

In March 2020, schools in California began to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Newsom issued a stay-at-home order and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond recommended that all schools close their physical campuses through the end of the school year (California Department of Education, 2020). In order to comply, more and more schools implemented distance learning (DL) in order to continue to serve students across the state.

Due to the pandemic, teachers all over California had to switch to and design online learning curricula for students. The focus of this study is on Chinese language teachers who made the transition from in-person classes to online teaching. The purpose of this study is to investigate how these teachers set up and conducted their virtual classrooms and what their reactions were to these transitions. Data was collected from surveying and interviewing teachers after they switched from traditional classes to the distance setting.

The data collected, showed a number of teachers were from weekend schools and after school programs. According to Chao (1997), Chinese heritage language schools have been successfully built outside the U.S. education system since the 1900s. These schools meet local students' learning needs (have different enrichment activities, like calligraphy and Chinese paining) and have strong parental support (parent volunteers).

Today's technological environment requires ongoing educational change to meet personal and professional needs. In *From Teaching to Learning: Transition in Distance Education* (Terrell, 1996, p. 3) notes that many schools are facing "the provision of much desired distance education programs and the call for a more student-centered environment." Teachers will need to move their traditional teaching approaches to new online environments. Although there are some issues when transitioning, a lot of "progressive institutions, are attempting to abet the automation of the traditional model by providing resources that not only meet the needs of the distance education student but reinforce the shift to a more learner-oriented paradigm" (Terrell, 1996, p. 4). Thus, due to the required distance learning this year, schools and teachers needed to think about how to switch to online teaching in order to meet students' academic and social emotional needs.

According to Ben-Chayim & Offir (2019, p. 2), there are three general models for distance learning:

1. The expert teacher, who teaches from a distance via synchronization;

2. Videotaped lectures from the expert teacher as an asynchronous means of teaching and learning;

3. A companion Internet website of the course as an asynchronous method of distance learning.

These three models were used during the distance learning due to the COVID pandemic. From teachers' interviews, there were various perspectives from different groups of teachers regarding distance teaching and learning.

In addition to the three models, teachers who used communicative approaches to language learning, and teachers who have a more traditional transmission model of learning will be discussed in this research. A language is learned by understanding communications in that language (Krashen, 1982). This is how children and adults learned language, whether it is their mother tongue or a foreign language. Communicative approaches are based on the natural way we learned languages which involves real communication between people. When language is learned this way, it is easily acquired. Based on the responses from the questionnaires, communicative approaches include interactive conversations, Role-play (Goh, 2016), Total Physical Response (TPR) (Glisan, 1986), Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), Project-based learning, Inquiry-based learning and so on. The traditional transmission model includes translation, grammar practice, memorization, etc.

The three modes of communication are interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2012, p. 7) wrote, "the three modes of communication provide the organizing principle for describing language performance across three ranges of performance: Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced." Since teachers are transitioning from traditional classrooms to online environments, the three interactive modes of communication would provide effective guidance for teachers to choose strategies for their teaching. This research includes what teachers reported and discussed about their students' level of classroom engagement and learning: before, during, and after the change to distance learning.

In their case study, Zembylas, Theodorou, and Pavlakis, in *The role of emotions in the experience of online learning: challenges and opportunities* (2008), showed how the balance of positive and negative emotions in online learning are important factors in students' success or failure. Positive emotions, such as joy, excitement, and relief are generated by flexible online interactions and result in satisfaction. Negative emotions often result in anxiety when students are not familiar with the online technology. Isolation from peers and others causes stress. In my case study, teachers will be asked to talk about their connections with students and to describe some of the emotions students felt. This includes the teachers' perceptions of the amount of stress that students felt during distance learning.

Fredette (2013) found that "A growing number of schools are turning to distance learning options for teaching Mandarin when budgets, small class size, or a lack of local Mandarin teachers mean they wouldn't otherwise be able to offer it"(p. 11). Fredette discussed how local schools hired teachers in China to teach remotely to students in Kansas. This lowered the costs and brought authentic Chinese culture to benefit local students. Since, many teachers transitioned to distance learning beginning in March 2020, virtual classes might be an option for the schools or districts that have a Chinese teacher shortage. In my study, teachers noted many online teaching strategies and interactive programs. The experiences they reported may help benefit the future of the remote teaching. In the near future, teachers could be hired to teach remotely for the schools who want to start Chinese programs but cannot find a local teacher.

During the distance learning, many teachers had a synchronous learning online classroom. Some of them had online meetings with students twice a week. In his research about online learning, Li (2016) stated that the online class size (for Chinese students learning English) was 50 students or more. "So, the question is how can online English teachers take care of so many students in one synchronous web conferencing classroom and yet still be able to have sufficient teacher-learner interactions"(p.269). Teachers in my interview suggested "small-group instruction" and this research will discuss about how teachers utilize this opportunity to effectively interact with students.

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Methods

Survey questions were distributed using a URL link that was emailed to the organizers and leaders of the following organizations: the California Language Teacher Association (CLTA), the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE), the California World Language Project (CWLP), the Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools (CLASS), the Chinese Language Teachers Association of California (CLTAC) and the San Francisco State University Division of International Education's Chinese Language & Culture Program (SFSU DOI Chinese Program). The researcher in this study is also one of the leaders who works with the SFSU DOI Chinese program to facilitate online teacher training. She sent the URL link directly to the WeChat Group and Email contact list of teachers in this program. The researcher does not know exactly how many teachers in California received links to the survey because the URL was shared publicly. However, she estimates that approximately 400 to 600 K-16 Chinese language teachers in California received it. In period of one month, 116 Chinese language teachers responded to the survey. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the survey. The researcher selected 20 teachers from the survey for the interviews. This investigation evaluated the results of these questionnaires and also used one-on-one interviews to get an even deeper understanding of how Chinese language teachers switched from in-person classes to online classes during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

This study was designed to investigate how Chinese language teachers transitioned from in-person classes to online learning. The first hypothesis was that

teachers would find it would be difficult to switch to the online environment. This hypothesis included following sub hypotheses. Teachers would find it hard to adapt many traditional classroom teaching strategies to online teaching. Teachers would it find more difficult to engage students online. Teachers would be required to communicate with parents more intensively than before. Teachers would find it more difficult to assess students' learning. Older teachers would find it more difficult to transition to online teaching. Teachers with a higher level of education would find the transition easier than those with less. Teachers who were more familiar with technology would be more effective at online teaching than teachers who were less familiar.

The online survey consists of 30 questions which ask Chinese language teachers about their demographic information, their level of education, and their experiences transitioning to online teaching. One hundred sixteen teachers from public, private, and weekend school programs responded to the survey. In addition, one-on-one interviews used open-ended questions to ask the teachers about their reactions to adapting to an online learning environment. Due to social distancing requirements, all twenty interviews were conducted using Zoom.

The interview questions were used to explore the questions asked in the survey in a deeper way. In addition, the researcher wanted to give teachers the opportunity to describe their experiences and go beyond the questions that the interviewer asked. This was important because the interviewees would think of things that the researcher had not thought to put in the survey questions. The last interview question was very open-ended and led to long discussions and follow-up questions about topics that had not been

covered in the survey. The researcher used the survey responses to choose a representative sample of the teachers for the in-person interviews. Please see Appendix B for a copy of these questions.

Eleven teachers agreed to be video recorded. Nine other teachers were interviewed but asked not to be recorded. Notes were taken during these interviews. Each interview was about 20-40 minutes long. All the teachers supported this study and conveyed that this kind of research was needed. They were excited to share their online experiences and to have the opportunity to reflect on their online teaching.

The results of the questionnaires and interviews were coded and separated into different categories that appeared to be important for teachers. This research used a convergent parallel mixed design (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The researcher collected responses from the questionnaire as quantitative data and the interviews as qualitative data, then merge the findings to make an interpretation. The quantitative and qualitative data collecting and analyzing happened during the same phase. After the researcher compared and related both data, she made a final interpretation. The importance of themes was determined by comparing the percentage of the various answers with what the twenty in-person interviewees talked about, in order to corroborate the findings.

Results

There were numerous interesting findings from interviews and questionnaires, both hypothesized and unanticipated. The following sections describe the teacher sample and the findings related to the study hypotheses.

Teacher Characteristics

Teachers in this research were from the public and private K-16 (kindergarten to college level) schools across California. Sixty-five percent of the teachers have Master's degrees; forty-five percent have State of California teaching credentials; eighty-eight percent are female. Chinese was the native language of ninety-five percent of the teachers. More than half of the teachers have at least seven years of teaching experience. The majority are from public secondary schools and private weekend schools. One-hundred-sixteen teachers completed the questionnaires, and twenty teachers participated in the interviews.

Type of school

Thirty-seven percent of the teachers teach middle and high school students in public and private schools. Twenty-nine percent teach in California weekend and after-school programs. Twenty-six percent teach in elementary schools and eight percent teach at the college level.

The Study Hypotheses and What the Evidence Supports

Teachers would find it difficult to switch to the online environment.

Forty-five percent of the teachers who took the survey expressed that distance teaching was *somewhat difficult*. Forty percent of the teachers (8 out of 20) in the face-to-face interviews responded with *somewhat difficult* and they cited various factors.

- Teachers said it was *somewhat difficult* to adjust their curriculum and their language teaching materials to the new online environment. They also found *somewhat difficult* to assess students.

- They deemed school or district distance learning policies *somewhat difficult.*

- Teachers found that supporting students and families during distance learning was *somewhat difficult*. This included teaching parents how to use online programs and contacting parents to encourage them to help students turn in homework.

- Teachers also indicated *somewhat difficult* to meet their family obligations, especially since their kids were at home and they also needed to learn online. Other family members also had to work online and share computers.

Some teachers reported that their schools did not provide sufficient training for the transition to online teaching. Teachers reported they needed more psychological and emotional support in order to deal with the stress of the pandemic. Many expressed that their schools worried about providing their students with psychological and emotional support but were less worried about them as teachers.

Even though 8 out of 20 teachers during the Zoom interviews expressed that online teaching was difficult, they were hard working and had a positive attitude toward

distance teaching. Although they mentioned virtual teaching was difficult, they were still looking for ways to engage and support their students in order to help them learn and grow both socially and emotionally.

The levels of difficulty for teaching in the online environment follow: *extremely easy* 3%, *somewhat easy* 18%, *neither easy nor difficult* 29%, *somewhat difficult* 45%, and *extremely difficult* 5%.

Teachers would find it hard to adapt interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational classroom strategies to online teaching.

The survey found many teachers recognized the interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes of communication as outlined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2012). This knowledge is important because when foreign language teachers choose online teaching programs, they need to choose programs that include all three modes of communication. These three modes of communication are useful for teachers for organizing language-teaching strategies. Although strategies can be grouped by these modes of communication, there is often overlap between them.

Interpersonal Communication. In the language teaching classroom, interpersonal communication usually happens between peer interaction, such as dialogue practice, asking and answering questions, sharing opinions on the topic. These strategies include interactive conversations, Role-play, TPR, and TPRS. The following is an example of interactive conversation. After a teacher, using gestures, models how to communicate an idea or a story with students interactively as she is using Chinese, the students will use

Chinese with gestures to express themselves and communicate with their peers. It was challenging to apply interpersonal communication strategies online when teachers had less online teaching experience, because they found it was hard to get responses from students as quickly as they did in the traditional classroom. In addition, students were shy about communicating with their peers in the online classroom.

Interpretive Communication. Interpretive communication refers to the interpretation of a topic through writing and speaking that involves higher order thinking; activities include summarizing or analyzing the article, commenting on the speeches, movies, books, and so on that are presented to students in Chinese. Two common language strategies that often involve interpretive communication are inquiry-based learning and project-based learning. Interpretive communication strategies were more difficult to use in the online environment because there was less time provided to the students online so it was more difficult to think aloud and to work with groups and make presentations to the class.

Presentational Communication. Presentational communication strategies show information by using the language. These strategies include gallery walk, project presentation (project-based learning and inquiry-based learning), and report writing. A sample gallery-walk activity would be to have a group of students create posters to describe the kinds of weather in Chinese and to put them on the wall of classroom, and have the students walk around the room to hear the different groups' presentations. It also turned to be harder to group younger students online. There was also less class time to do

group work. When teachers assigned students group projects for homework after class, they were less motivated to complete the projects.

Survey question 19 states: "What kind of language teaching strategies do you use in your virtual classroom? (Select all that apply)." More than half of the teachers responded with "interactive conversation." The other responses are listed below.

Table 1. Language Teaching Strategies Used in the Virtual Classroom

Teaching Strategies	Number of Teachers	Percent of Teachers
Interactive Conversations	62	54%
Translation	39	34%
Grammar Practice	40	35%
Memorization	31	27%
Role-play	33	29%
Total Physical Response	23	20%
TPRS	28	24%
Project-based learning	34	30%
Inquiry-based learning	25	22%
Other	5	4%

TPRS: Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling.

During the interviews, some teachers expressed their concern that they could not use the strategies they normally used in the classroom online.

- Many felt the biggest challenge in an online class was that there was less time to communicate with students.

- Many thought there was less interpersonal interaction in teaching and learning, and this was not helpful in learning a language, especially for beginners.

However, the teachers who felt confident about teaching online were comfortable with adapting their classroom strategies and using interactive computer-based language learning programs. They replied that they utilized different online programs to apply those communication strategies. For example, they used Flipgrid (an online interactive program to record video clips) which let students practice speaking using video recording, and by doing this, students could review and comment on their peers while using the Chinese language.

Teachers would find it difficult to engage students online.

Eight out of twenty teachers (40%) in the interviews said that students were less motivated online and the interviewees reported a number of reasons for this. This include that there was not clear communication between the school, the teachers and the families in the beginning. Most instructional activities were not originally designed for distance learning. Many schools did not provide adequate training for teachers to utilize online programs. For example, schools provided general training about distance learning, but did not give teachers explicit instructions on how to implement online teaching strategies. So teachers only got principles and general guidance, but they did not know how to

implement them. Schools did not train teachers on how to motivate students for online learning. Sixteen out of the twenty teachers from the interview reported that because of grading policies that required the teachers to give their students the grades that they had earned in the previous semester, some students did not attend classes at all. Some families did not have internet or computer access to distance learning so they did not participate either.

Six out of twenty teachers, from the interviews, reported that students did not turn on their video cameras during the virtual meeting sessions. There were two reasons that students did not turn on their cameras. The first one was because the districts did not allow students to turn them on due to a policy designed to protect students' privacy. The other one was that they chose not to turn on their cameras because they did not feel comfortable to be seen online. This reduced the level of interaction between teachers and students because it was not effective to communicate without facial expressions. For example, some teachers mentioned they asked questions during the class while the students were gone. In addition, two out of the twenty interviewees did not use the internet to teach synchronous distance classes at all. So, there was no live student-teacher interaction. Students were given independent assignments through Google Classroom.

There were a number of reasons for this. Due to the short advanced notice that required their schools to close, their students were not prepared for distance learning. In addition, some students did not have computers or internet access. Many families did not know how to use the technology, and their schools lacked an awareness of how important affect and synchronous face-to-face interpersonal communication was for foreign

language learning. The complexity of distance learning created many issues that prevented these two teachers' students from meeting online. Thus, they were unable to engage with their students in any meaningful way at all.

Teachers would be required to communicate with parents more intensively than before.

One of the teachers from the interviews mentioned that "language learning is a family thing: if the whole family supports a student to learn a new language and culture, the student will progress." Other teachers mentioned that students engaged more in the virtual class when they had parents at home. This was especially true for younger learners. They needed parents to set up computers and other electronic devices so they could participate in the online courses. Parental and family support reinforced the learning process, so that students were more motivated to learn the Chinese language. High school teachers also talked about the importance of parental involvement but they were not very specific about how, whereas the elementary school teachers were.

Almost half of the teachers from the questionnaire mentioned that there was a moderate increase in parental involvement. For example, some of the assignments were posted on Google Classroom, and teachers needed to call parents to help the students to turn in assignments. Some parents needed to learn how to use different online programs in order to support their children's learning. Parents' support was needed in order to help check and turn in students' homework online. Distance learning also required parental monitoring for kids who were easily distracted.

Twenty percent of teachers in the survey reported no change in parental involvement with their students' learning. Twenty-three percent reported it slightly changed. Forty-one percent reported it moderately changed, and sixteen percent reported it significantly changed.

Older teachers would find it more difficult to engage students after transitioning to online teaching.

The results of the hypothesis that *older teachers would find it more difficult to engage students after transitioning to online teaching* were not straight forward. Seventy-five percent of the 60 year-old and up group of teachers found the transition to online more difficult than the other teachers did. However, the results for the groups under 60 were similar to each other: 41% of the 20-30 year-old group found it difficult; 42% of the 31-40 year-olds found it difficult; 38% of the 41- 50 year-olds found it difficult; and 43% of 51-60 year-old group found it difficult. However, the 41-50 year-old group found online teaching 5% easier than the 51-60 year-old group. One reason that this group may have found transition slightly easier is because this group may have more experience with online technology. The 41-50 year-old group also found it easier than the 20-30 year-old and the 31-40 year-old groups, who probably had equal technology skills, but did not have as much teaching experiences as the 41-50 year-old group. See Table 2 below.

Table 2. Relationship between Age and Opinions on the Difficult of Teaching Online.

Teachers' Age	Found Transition Difficult	Average Years of Experience Teaching
20-30	41%	2.8
31-40	42%	6.4
41-50	38%	9.3
51-60	43%	15.8
60 and up	75%	13.8

In the interviews, teachers from all age groups mentioned that it was difficult to move online and gave various reasons. One reason was because the amount of weekly instructional time decreased. All twenty teachers said this was a problem. Many teachers dropped from 40 hours a week to less than 10 hours per week. There was not enough time to implement all of their lesson content within such a short time. Another reason was they spent extra time in supporting students and families with the technology. Six out of twenty teachers (30%) said this was a problem. This caused extra stress for teachers and students in the move to online teaching. The extra stress caused extra frustration and having the extra stress took away teachers' energy from focusing on the teaching curriculum.

Teachers with higher levels of education would find the transition easier than those with less.

All of the Chinese language teachers in California were college educated and more than half had Master's degrees. Twenty-nine percent had bachelor's degrees, sixty-four percent had master's degrees, four percent had PhDs, and two percent had associate degrees. In addition to their bachelor's and master's degrees, many had taken different kinds of language teaching workshops and training. The higher the education level that teachers had, the easier they felt it was to teach online. This relationship is easy to see when comparing the group with bachelor's degrees with the group with master's degrees.

Among the survey respondents, 25% of the teachers with master's degrees felt it was *somewhat easy* to teach online, while only 8% of the teachers with bachelor's degrees felt it was *somewhat easy* to teach online.

Teachers who were more familiar with technology would be more effective at online teaching than teachers who were less familiar.

Three categories in the survey, *moderately familiar, very familiar,* and *extremely familiar,* were combined into a "Most Familiar" category and came to a total of 81% of the teachers. Their degree of familiarity with technology was compared with the "Least Familiar" group of teachers who rated their familiarity with technology as *not familiar* and *slightly familiar.* They combined and came to a total of 19%.

The survey found the level of student engagement for those most familiar with technology was 77%. The level of student engagement for those least familiar with technology was 75%. This small difference was not expected.

Much new technology today, such as online interactive programs, is designed to be teacher-user friendly and hassle-free. So it is easier to master them. In addition, since technology is widely available today, it is possible that when many Chinese language teachers shifted to online teaching, they implemented some of the technology tools they used in their classrooms before they transitioned. In addition, it is possible that because of professional training on how to use language teaching technology, many Chinese language teachers are more comfortable than before with the requirements of an online curriculum. This results in better student engagement online and may explain the small difference between the Most Familiar and Least Familiar groups.

Unanticipated Results

Most of the unanticipated results were the product of the face-to-face online interviews. Teachers felt excited to share their online teaching experience and they thought the interview was a good opportunity to reflect on their online teaching and to prepare for the possibility of distance learning in the fall.

Teacher's education and student engagement before and after COVID-19

Most of the Chinese language teachers who teach in public schools have a master's degree, in addition to their state-certified teaching credential. So in addition to having the most education, they have the most teaching experience. They also felt more confident to be able to engage students in the online classroom. However, even they reported it more difficult to engage their students when they switched to online teaching.

The following table shows teachers' perceptions of their students' levels of engagement before and after the transition to distance learning. It is interesting to note that students with bachelor's degrees slightly outperformed the teachers with master's degrees, as far as student engagement was concerned. The average amount of student engagement for all teachers dropped by about a half-level (53%). For example, if a student was highly engaged, this amount of drop would represent the half way point between highly engaged and moderately engaged. Forty-seven teachers (64%) reported a drop in student engagement. See Table 3 below.

Table 3. Level of Student Engagement before and after Transition

Degree	Engagement Before	Engagement After	# Teachers
Bachelor's	Highly Engaged	Highly Engaged	2
Bachelor's	Highly Engaged	Moderately Engaged	6
Bachelor's	Highly Engaged	Not Highly Engaged	1
Bachelor's	Moderately Engaged	Highly Engaged	2
Bachelor's	Moderately Engaged	Moderately Engaged	7
Bachelor's	Moderately Engaged	Not Highly Engaged	3
		Total Teachers with Bachelor's	21
		Average Drop	-43% one step
		Number of Teachers Dropped	11 (52%)
Master's	Highly Engaged	Highly Engaged	7
Master's	Highly Engaged	Moderately Engaged	19
Master's	Highly Engaged	Not Highly Engaged	5
Master's	Moderately Engaged	Highly Engaged	4
Master's	Moderately Engaged	Moderately Engaged	8
Master's	Moderately Engaged	Not Highly Engaged	4
Master's	Not Highly Engaged	Moderately Engaged	2
		Total Teachers with Master's	49
		Average Drop	-55% one step
		Number of Teachers Dropped	33 (67%)
PhD	Highly Engaged	Moderately Engaged	3
PhD	Moderately Engaged	Moderately Engaged	1
		Total Teachers with PhDs	4
		Average Drop	-75% one step
		Number of Teachers Dropped	3 (75%)
All		Total Number of Teachers	74
		Average Drop	-53% one step
		Number of Teachers Dropped	47 (64%)

Teachers noticed the importance of the teacher-student connection and the importance for a teacher to understand the emotional factors in learning.

After the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts began to implement social and emotional support for staff and students. Training specialists and coaches provided social and emotional support for school sites and communities. However, the amount of that support given was not enough to meet the needs of the teachers and students. During my interviews with teachers, I noticed that the teachers who were given the social and emotional support by the training specialists were, in turn, able to give their students social and emotional support. And their students showed more interest in online learning. On the other hand, the teachers that mentioned that they did not have enough training to provide their students with social and emotional support, usually had a less engaged class during distance learning.

Several teachers from the interviews noticed that social and emotional support was an important part of successful distance learning. When students' Affective Filters (Krashen, 1982) are high, the ability to acquire a foreign language is reduced. There was and continues to be a lot of stress due to the ongoing pandemic. If our teachers do not have enough social and emotional training, they will not be able to provide the necessary social and emotional support for their students and parents. If the students' Affective Filters are lowered, their language learning will be more successful.

Some teachers from the interviews discussed how to utilize social and emotional support. Here are some examples.

- During the first 5 to 10 minutes (warm-up) of the class, teachers greet students by asking things like, "How are you doing these days? Is there something I could help you and your family with?"

- Teachers keep office hours in order to give advice to students. This especially helps students who feel too anxious to focus on academic learning.

- Some elementary school teachers use online programs like "GoNoodle" (https://www.gonoodle.com/) to help kids practice movement and mindfulness. Such online programs are usually used during the transitions between subject periods.

Teachers reported that the strategies above helped them connect with their students and they built stronger student-teacher bonds during distance learning. Once the students felt the teachers cared, their anxiety levels usually became lower and they were more able to learn from their teachers.

Teachers found small-group instruction was more effective.

All of the teachers from interviews said that the small-group instruction was more effective than whole class teaching while learning online. Part of this was due to better teacher-student connections which created a more positive emotional environment. The teachers usually taught about 30-45 minutes for each online class, and there usually was not enough time to interact with every student. The teachers who got less technology training in how to engage all students, felt the results of the training were not adequate to teach the whole class at one time. In order to compensate for this failure, some teachers

set up what they called "office hours" and taught students "one-on-one" and also used "small-group time" to implement the instruction.

Professional development specifically designed to support online teaching

During the interviews, teachers reported that although they took a variety of Chinese language teaching workshops, they still used more English than Chinese in their classrooms. After these teachers transitioned to online classes, they spoke even more English than Chinese in their Chinese language classrooms.

As mentioned above, the teachers took several Chinese language teaching training workshops. These trainings were offered on-site and on-line. Some of the workshops teachers referred to are offered by the following language teaching training organizations: STARTALK language program administrated by the National Foreign Language Center (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/); the San Francisco State University Division of International Education's Chinese Language & Culture Program (SFSU DOI Chinese Program); the National Chinese Language Conference (NCLC); and the Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools (CLASS).

However, even though these teachers had much Chinese language teaching training, English was used in many Chinese language online classrooms about 50% of the time, after the pandemic. These teachers stated that the lower the students' language level was, the more they had to use English because they believed those students did not have enough Chinese language experience. They felt that if too much Chinese was spoken in the class, the students would not understand what the teacher was saying and that it would make the students feel frustrated and even drop it. When teachers taught about

Chinese culture, they also mentioned that they needed English to explain the cultural

background knowledge of China.

The few teachers that used the Chinese language in class more than 90% of the

time were an exception. Those teachers had the following things in common:

- The teachers were familiar with the use of different online tools, and they knew

  how to use them to communicate interactively in the classroom.

- For teaching culture, these teachers organized their lessons according to a

  product, process, and perspectives view of culture. For instance, a teacher is

  teaching a virtual lesson about "Chinese noodles" on Zoom. He/she would show

  the cultural product: the pictures, video clips or real Chinese noodles. Then the

  teacher would cook the noodles at home and students could see the process. At

  the same time, teachers would explain that Chinese people eat long noodles on

  their birthday to represent their wish to live a long life. And this represents a

  Chinese perspectives about the value and celebration of longevity.

- They also used a lot of authentic materials that the students could easily find at

  home. This strategy engaged students in fun ways so they could understand

  communications in the Chinese language without resorting to English.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate how Chinese language teachers coped with the mass transition from in-person classrooms to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. I designed the questionnaire with 30 questions and sent them to Chinese language teachers in California through an online survey tool. One-hundred-sixteen teachers responded, and those who did showed significant interest in this research. From the 116 surveys, I selected 20 teachers from public and private K-16 schools, and I conducted online interviews with them on Zoom. Each took about 20 to 40 minutes long.

I noticed that the teachers were very dedicated to teaching the Chinese language, and this did not differ whether they taught in-person or in online settings. During the spring pandemic period, teachers continued to show great patience and positive attitudes and looked for ways to support students and families.

In the interviews, the teachers told me that their students and families appreciated their help during the pandemic's difficult times. Compared to Chinese language teachers ten years ago, these teachers are more confident and comfortable with participation in community events and interactions with local families. Their efforts to support students and families greatly improved the teacher-community connection, and parents became more involved in students' learning.

During the pandemic, the Chinese teachers participated in many online training opportunities in order to broaden their ability to teach more effectively online. They

shared a lot of thoughtful ideas in the surveys and interviews. Some of these were: vivid online curricula that enhance foreign language teaching, various language websites to enrich Chinese language learning activities (see Appendix C), approaches to involve parents in students' learning, and how to use authentic materials in the Chinese online classroom by using materials that students could find at home and show to the class. For example, the teacher tells students 你可以从冰箱里拿个东西给同学们看吗？[Could you please go to the refrigerator and bring me something to show the class?] This is a great online interactive teaching strategy, using realia found in the home, that several interviewees shared with me.

California schools changed to distance learning in the middle of spring semester, March 2020. The teachers and students already knew each other when they switched to online learning. Teachers were familiar with their students' learning interests and learning styles. Students knew their teacher's schedule and were used to the teacher's personality and routines. However, it is apparent many schools will continue using the online format this fall. Some teachers expressed a concern that the distance learning environment will be harder to teach in this fall, because they will have new students. The students might not engage in the class because of their lack of attachment to their class and the teacher. Other teachers thought that it would be easier for teachers to teach and students to learn this fall because they have already experienced online learning.

After surveying and interviewing the teachers, there was a consensus that most teachers found it somewhat difficult to teach online and described their ability to engage students in online learning as moderate. The surveys and interviews identified different

factors that influenced the teachers' ability to successfully switch to online learning. Teachers found it hard to adapt the communicative interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational language teaching strategies from the classroom to the online teaching environment.

Teachers also found that they needed to communicate with parents more intensively than before. This was necessary in order to make sure that children had access to and could use the technology; to make sure that students completed their assignments and turned them in; and to help the children focus and make sure they did not get distracted.

Only teachers 60 years old or older, when compared to the other teachers, found it significantly difficult to teach online. Teachers with master's degrees found it easier to switch to online education than teachers with bachelor' s degrees. The group of teachers who reported that they were more familiar with technology thought that they were more effective teaching online than those who were less familiar with the technology.

Some of the unanticipated results from the study included the following. Teachers noticed that the quality of student-teacher connections was important for successful online teaching. Small-group instruction was much more effective than large group instruction. Even though teachers had much language teaching training, they found that they used more English in the online Chinese classroom environment than they did in the physical Chinese language classroom at their brick and mortar schools. This shows the importance of supporting language teachers in how to adapt traditional classroom language teaching practices to the online environment. A number of teachers discovered

novel ways to implement those strategies in the new online environment, and other teachers can learn from their examples.

The group of teachers who were 41-50 years old turned to be the most successful at transitioning to online teaching. The average difference between this group and three other groups, excluding the teachers who were 60 years old and above, was 4%. This result was unexpected. It is possible that their age group was better using technology than the group of 51-60 year-old teachers and because they had more experience teaching than the 20-40 year-old teachers, they may have felt more comfortable.

School policies also appeared to influence student motivation and learning. Some school districts had a policy which prohibited students to turn on their video cameras to protect privacy rights. According to teacher interviews, students not being able to see one another undermined students' abilities to learn, because it limited their face-to-face interactions which are so important to foreign language learning.

Teachers also reported they felt certain school district grading policies undermined student motivation. When credit/non-credit grading policies were adopted, student motivation dropped. Some districts mandated that students had to be given the same grade or above, the one they earned in the previous semester. This policy made students motivation drop, as well.

Recommendations for Replicating this Study

If I were to conduct this study again, I would rewrite questions number 28 and 29 below:

28. Do you have any students who were not motivated in in-person classes that are more motivated online?

    ☐   Yes

    ☐   No

29. Do you have any students who were motivated in in-person classes but are not motivated online?

    ☐   Yes

    ☐   No

The questions were too general to provide useful information. Teachers have both motivated and not motivated students no matter whether in in-person or online classes. These questions did not assess the percent of change from the traditional classroom to distance learning.

I found the face-to-face interviews very valuable, and they uncovered many unexpected results that the researcher had not anticipated. If I designed another questionnaire, I would add more questions in which teachers typed in short responses. It would be nice to take the strength of an open-ended interview and try to design more open-ended questions which could be used in a large survey.

A survey questionnaire with opportunities for short open-ended responses would provide the possibility of generating more such unexpected results and also provide findings that were more generalizable. For instance, many teachers in the in-person

interviews spoke about the importance of the social-emotional connections between students and teachers. The researcher suspects that many of the teachers in the survey questionnaire held this belief as well, but they were not given a chance to express this. Perhaps such an open-ended question would have uncovered these beliefs.

Recommendations from the Study

The last question in the face-to-face interview was: *What strategies or knowledge do you think we need to have in the future if we have a situation similar to this again?* In the list below, I would like to share some of their suggestions, with a couple of my own.

Most teachers said that they were not very well prepared for the transition to online teaching, and some were not prepared at all. They made the following suggestions.

- We should build a distance teaching and learning system that includes curriculum and assessment altogether.

- We need to insure adequate instructional technology training for teachers, support staff, students and their families.

- There needs to be more clear and effective communication from school districts to school sites, and from schools to staff, because schools were slow in responding to teachers and students' families' concerns.

- Provide small group classwork and support for students in the online curriculum. The online curriculum requires more small group support in order to be effective.

- Provide social and emotional support training for teachers so they can provide social and emotional support for their students. This includes stress and anxiety reduction strategies.

The success of online teaching during this pandemic and future ones requires that we all work together and share our experiences about what worked for our schools and students.

Conclusion

After conducting this research, one important take-away is that teachers noticed it was hard to transition to online teaching. This demonstrated the need to build a support system that includes curriculum and assessment specifically designed for distance learning.

Parent involvement was very important for the distance learning. We should provide support to involve parents in the distance learning. Teachers communicated with parents more often and more intensively than before and it took teachers a lot of time to assist parents to help their children to access the online curriculum and turn in their homework.

Besides teachers, other departments in schools and school districts, such as technology offices helped with setting up online curricula and instructional activities. This also includes community liaisons, such translators, who need to work together to support parental involvement in distance learning.

Social-emotional support training is very much needed for teachers and students. Due to the pandemic, many teachers felt very stressed during the transition to online teaching and they need social-emotional support.

This study also revealed that a good student-teacher connection is effective in lowering students' Affective Filters and this helps when they are learning a foreign language.

Limitations

The questionnaire in this research was conducted in English. Since 95% of the teachers were native speakers of Chinese, it might have been better to use a bilingual survey in both Chinese and English, so that it would be more comfortable and convenient for the teachers to have two language options when they answered the questionnaires. I noticed that when I interviewed teachers, they favored using Chinese and it seemed they were better able to express their experiences using that language. This is important to consider when conducting research with bilingual participants, especially in the case of immigrant teachers who are using their native languages to teach.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant Questionnaire

Name:_____   Date:_____

Participant Questionnaire
This survey should take you no more than 15 minutes to fill out.
The information gathered in this survey is important because if it will help to discover some of the benefits and drawbacks that teachers experienced when moving from in-person classroom to online teaching.

1.How old are you?

    ☐ 20-30
    ☐ 31-40
    ☐ 41-50
    ☐ 51-60
    ☐ 60 and up

2. What is your gender?

    ☐ male
    ☐ female
    ☐ other

3. What is your highest level of education?
    ☐ High school degree
    ☐ Associate's degree
    ☐ Bachelor's degree
    ☐ Master's degree
    ☐ Doctoral degree

4. What is your native language (母语)?

□ Chinese
□ English
□ Other

5. What age students do you currently teach?
□ elementary school students
□ middle school students
□ high school students
□ college students

6. What kind of school do you teach at?
□ public elementary school
□ public secondary school
□ private elementary school
□ private secondary school
□ weekend/after-school program
□ college/university

7. Do you teach students privately outside of the schools indicated above? If so, what school level are they?
□ N/A
□ elementary school age
□ middle school age
□ high school age
□ college students

8. Have you taught in China?
□ Yes
□ No

9. Do you have a government recognized teaching credential/certificate in China or the United States?
□ In the United States
□ In China
□ Neither

10. What kind of language teaching training do you have?

☐ English Learner Authorization/CLAD/BCLAD Certificate through California Teacher of English Learners (CTEL) program

☐ Chinese language teaching training sessions, short-term programs, webinars, or any other such programs (STARTALK, SF State DoIE Chinese, UCLA MTLI programs, CLASS)

☐ Other language teaching training programs from GLAD, ACTFL, CLTA, CABE, etc.

☐ I do not have any formal language teaching training

11. How many years have you been teaching Chinese in the U.S.?
    ☐ 0-3 years
    ☐ 4-6 years
    ☐ 7-10 years
    ☐ 10-20 years
    ☐ 20 years and up

12. How often did you teach Chinese, *before* going online due to the COVID-19 virus?
    ☐ More than 40 hours per week
    ☐ 31-40 hours per week
    ☐ 21-30 hours per week
    ☐ 11-20 hours per week
    ☐ 10 hours or less per week

13. How often do you teach Chinese now, *after* going online due to the COVID-19 virus?
    ☐ More than 40 hours per week
    ☐ 31-40 hours per week
    ☐ 21-30 hours per week
    ☐ 11-20 hours per week
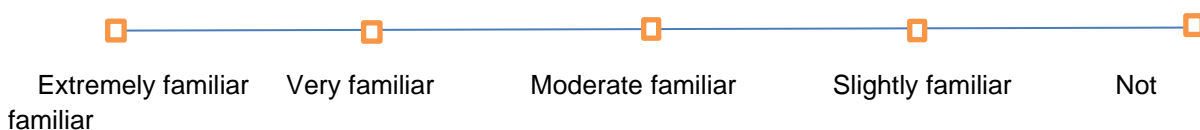   ☐ 10 hours or less per week

14. Did you teach online before COVID-19?
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

15. When did you start your current online teaching due to the COVID-19 virus?
    - ☐ Less than 1 month
    - ☐ 1 month
    - ☐ 2 months
    - ☐ 3 months
    - ☐ 4 months or more

16. How familiar are you with the technology used to teach online?

Extremely familiar   Very familiar   Moderate familiar   Slightly familiar   Not familiar

17. Which online platform do you use ?
    - ☐ Zoom
    - ☐ Skype
    - ☐ Google Meet
    - ☐ WebEx
    - ☐ Facetime
    - ☐ Wechat
    - ☐ Other, please specify_____

18. Are there any specific online interactive language teaching programs you use in your virtual classrooms?
    - ☐ Quizlet
    - ☐ Edpuzzle
    - ☐ Kahoot!
    - ☐ Class Dojo
    - ☐ Pear Deck
    - ☐ Seesaw
    - ☐ Story Jumper
    - ☐ Other, please specify_____

19. What kind of language teaching strategies do you use in your virtual classroom?

☐ Interactive conversations
☐ Translation
☐ Grammar practice
☐ Memorization
☐ Role-play
☐ Total Physical Response (TPR)
☐ Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)
☐ Project-based-learning(PBL)
☐ Inquiry-based-teaching
☐ Other, please specify_____

20. How much has your Chinese teaching ***curriculum*** changed after moving online? (do it as a scale on online survey form)
   ☐ Not at all change
   ☐ Slightly changed
   ☐ Moderately changed
   ☐ Significantly changed

21. How much have your Chinese teaching ***materials*** changed after transition to the online classroom? (do it as a scale on online survey form)
   ☐ Not at all change
   ☐ Slightly changed
   ☐ Moderately changed
   ☐ Significantly changed

22. What kind of assessments in the list below did you use in your ***in-person classroom?***
   ☐ students' self-assessments
   ☐ informal observations
   ☐ check-lists
   ☐ grading project
   ☐ portfolios
   ☐ quizzes
   ☐ final tests
   ☐ essays
   ☐ rubrics
   ☐ others

23. What kind of assessments in the list below do you use in your *online classroom*?
    □ students' self-assessments
    □ informal observations
    □ check-lists
    □ grading projects
    □ portfolios
    □ quizzes
    □ final tests
    □ essays
    □ rubrics
    □ others

24. Has the level of parental involvement with you changed as a result of moving to online classes?
    □ Not at all change
    □ Slightly changed
    □ Moderately changed
    □ Significantly changed
       Please explain_____

25. How would you rate the difficulty of teaching online?

   □ Very easy   □ Easy   □ Neutral Difficult   □ Difficult   □
Very difficult

26. Rate the average level of your students' engagement before you went online. Before：
    □ Not highly engaged
    □ Moderately engaged
    □ Highly engaged
    □ Not highly engaged
    □ Moderately engaged
    □ Highly engaged

27. Rate the average level of your students' engagement after you went online. After：
    □ Not highly engaged
    □ Moderately engaged
    □ Highly engaged
    □ Not highly engaged
    □ Moderately engaged
    □ Highly engaged

28. Do you have any students who were not motivated in in-person classes that are more motivated online?
    □ Yes
    □ No

29. Do you have any students who were motivated in in-person classes but are not motivated online?
    □ Yes
    □ No

30. So far, how would you rate your satisfaction with online teaching? (scale on online survey form)
    □ Not at all satisfied
    □ Slightly satisfied
    □ Moderately satisfied
    □ Very satisfied
    □ Extremely satisfied
    Please explain_____

Appendix B

Participant Interview

Name:_____   Date:_____

Participants Interview
This interview should take you no more than 30 minutes.
This information gathered in this form is important because if it will help to discover some of the benefits and drawbacks that teachers experienced when moving from in-person classroom to online teaching.

1. What grade are you teaching?

2. What is your native language?

3. Have you taught in China? How many years?

4. What kind of language teaching training program do you have?

5. How many years have you been teaching in the U.S.?

6. How often do you teach Chinese online now?

7. Have you taught online before? What is your past experiences teaching online? If not, please skip this one.

8. Which online platform, such as Zoom or Skype, do you use?

9. Are there any specific online interactive program you use in your virtual classrooms?

10. What kind of teaching strategies do you teach online?

11. What activities do you use in your online classroom? Do you think they are effective? Why?

12. How do you structure your online classroom?

13. What is your philosophy for teaching Chinese as a foreign language?

14. Briefly describe your teaching curriculum before and after you went online. Is there a difference, and if so, how did you adapt it?

15. Briefly describe your teaching materials before and after you went online. Is there a difference, and if so, how did you adapt them?

16. What kind of assessments in the list below did you use in your ***in-person classroom and online classroom?*** How do you like them?

17. In what ways have you tried to motivate your students to learn Chinese online?

18. Has moving to online classes changed your students' engagement (interest and motivation) and learning? If so, to what specific things do you attribute these changes?

19. Has the level of parental involvement with you changed as a result of moving to online classes? Please talk about it.

20. How has the switch to online classrooms affected your students' learning?

21. What theories of how to learn a foreign language do you try to apply in the classroom?

22. What problems have you had in teaching in online classroom?

23. How would you compare in-class teaching to online teaching?

24. Do you have any suggestions for other teachers when they are preparing or working online to teach students? Do you think what strategies or knowledge we need to have for the future if we have the similar situation again?

Appendix C

The interactive language teaching programs teachers mentioned in the

questionnaire.

Quizlet. https://quizlet.com/

Edpuzzle. https://edpuzzle.com/

Kahoot!. https://kahoot.com/schools-u/

Class Dojo. https://www.classdojo.com/

Pear Deck. https://www.peardeck.com/

Seesaw. https://web.seesaw.me/

Story Jumper. https://www.storyjumper.com/

Schoology. https://www.schoology.com/

Wordwall. https://wordwall.net/

Gimkit. https://www.gimkit.com/

Google Docs. https://www.google.com/docs/about/

Google Classroom. classroom.google.com

Google Slides. https://www.google.com/slides/about/

Google Forms. https://www.google.com/forms/about/

Flipgrid. https://info.flipgrid.com/

Padlet. https://padlet.com/

Yabla. https://www.yabla.com/

Chinese Ponddy. https://chinese.ponddy.com/

Better Immersion. https://www.betterimmersion.com/

Nearpod. https://nearpod.com/
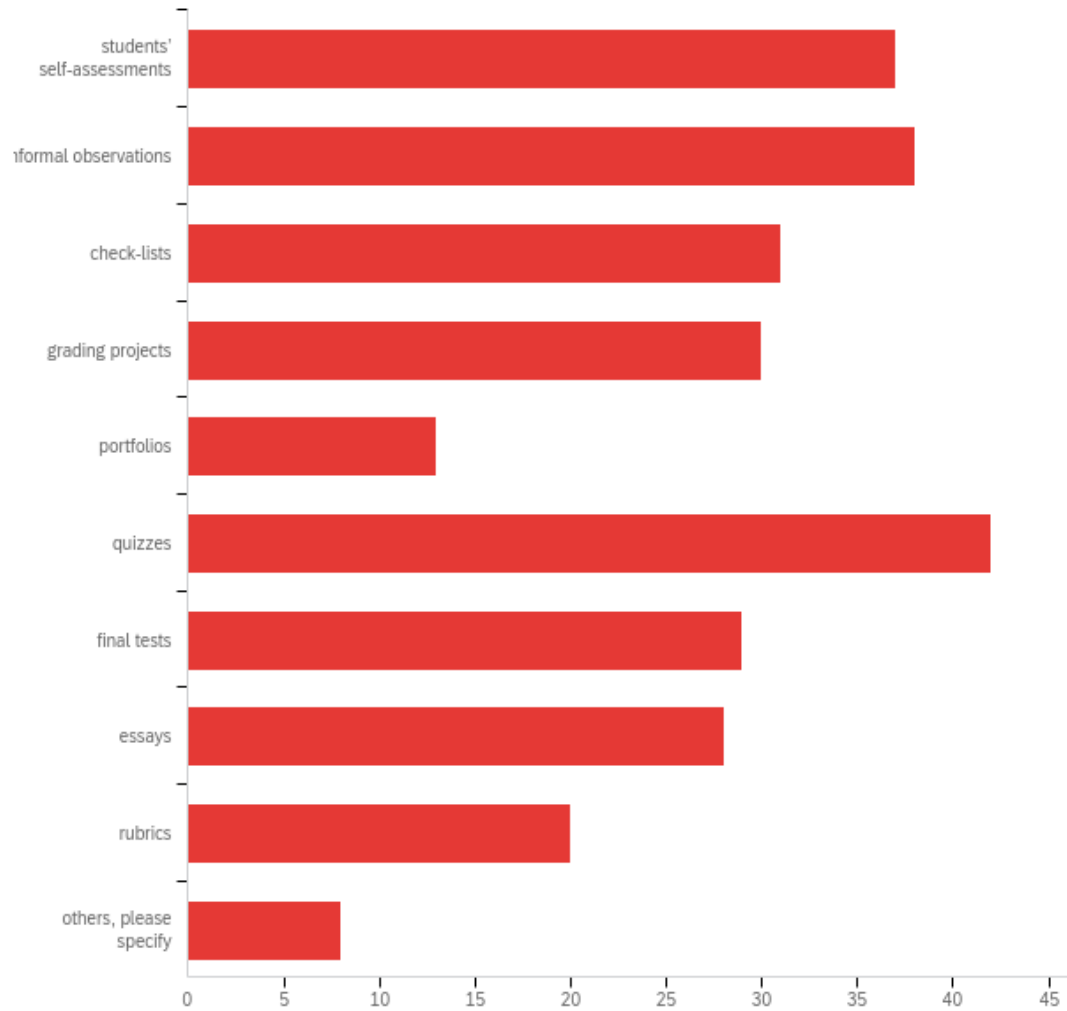
Story Creator. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/story-creator-easy-story-book-maker-for-kids/id545369477

Book Creator. https://bookcreator.com/

Appendix D

23 - What kind of assessments in the list below do you use in your online classroom? (Select all that apply)

#	Answer	%	Count
1	students' self-assessments	13.41%	37
2	informal observations	13.77%	38
3	check-lists	11.23%	31
4	grading projects	10.87%	30
5	portfolios	4.71%	13
6	quizzes	15.22%	42
7	final tests	10.51%	29
8	essays	10.14%	28
9	rubrics	7.25%	20
10	others, please specify	2.90%	8
	Total	100%	276

Q23_10_TEXT - others, please specify

others, please specify - Text

Audio Recordings

Kahoot! Or other online assesament tool

No

N/A

Pair/group presentation

Phone talk

Writing

We can't teach new content or assess students during the closure.