A Case of Transition: An Independent Study Course Goes Online

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Abstract
Ever since the switch from face-to-face to online classes in 2020, the greatest initial challenge for teachers and students has been to adjust and adapt to the technology necessary for this change to happen. Some concerns included whether students had adequate connectivity to the internet, and if they had the necessary skills and technological know-how to participate actively in online classes. In this case study we address these concerns as well as identify additional pedagogical issues and examine how teaching of particular content may be better in an online context. One of the biggest challenges was how to transform a face-to-face Independent Study Course into one delivered online. Learners were encouraged to take charge of their learning as they were guided through the processes of setting goals, selecting materials, planning learning activities, monitoring progress, and assessing outcomes.

As we worked to convert the course, we faced a number of issues. For example, how could we monitor student activities? How could we make sure they were getting enough opportunities to use what they learned? To explore these questions, we adopt a narrative style and describe how we modified and transformed the mode of delivery from face-to-face to online. We begin with a description of the original classroom-based course. Next, we discuss the challenges we faced moving online. We conclude by offering pedagogical recommendations in the hope that the lessons we learned will be of help to other educators interested in delivering similar courses.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic left educators with a challenging opportunity to explore new course formats that were not normally considered as part of their pedagogical skill set. In Japan, the academic year starts in April, which was just around the time when the global pandemic began. At Okayama University, the administration moved cautiously and did not announce the switch from face-to-face to online classes until around the second week of the first term of 2020. Teachers frantically had to change their syllabuses and somehow make their handouts and study materials available for students to access online.

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The university had already implemented a Learning Management System (LMS) called Moodle, but a majority of the teachers were only using it to check student lists and post short announcements to their students. With the switch to online, teachers hastily learned how to use basic Moodle features such as posting handouts, assigning homework, making quizzes, and linking other online materials for their classes. One of these classes that went online was the Independent Study Course (ISC) taught by the two authors. In this paper, we adopt a narrative mode and present the case of how ISC traversed from a face-to-face course into a successful online one.

We feel that the ISC adapted well to an online format. As the title of the course indicates, students learn to study independently by working on their own and at their own pace in order to build on the English skills they have now and broaden their knowledge of how to learn a language. They also learn to make specific language goals, as well as reflect and monitor their own progress. The teacher acts as an advisor who guides students and helps them build more self-awareness as language learners rather than teaching specific vocabulary or grammar points.

We start this paper with some historical background of the ISC and its structure. We then report on how it transformed into a fully online course. At the end of each course, we asked students to fill in a survey with questions pertaining to their learning process and the course content. Some overall results of this student survey and reflections on our part are described. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for keeping this course online and offer pedagogical recommendations in the hope that the lessons we learned on our journey will be of help to other educators interested in delivering similar courses.

2 The Independent Study Course: An Overview

The ISC, created by Garold Murray (2009), had been developed for Japanese university students with the intention of promoting learner autonomy. Based on Holec's learner autonomy model (1981), learners were introduced to the notion of taking charge of their learning and guided through the processes of setting goals, selecting engaging materials, planning learning activities, monitoring their progress, and assessing outcomes. The original course was designed for a 15-week semester, however, after several iterations, it evolved into the current one-term, 8-week course, as described in this paper.

At the beginning of the term, students wrote their language learning history, their anticipated future language history, their beliefs in language learning, and their personal goal for the course. Each week during the 100-minute period, the teacher introduced a learning strategy for the first 20 minutes or so, then let the students try the activity on their own for the remainder of the period. Whenever students did a learning activity, they recorded their work in a Learning Log (LL), which the teacher checked regularly. There were opportunities for students to reflect on their learning by writing in their LLs and talking about their learning with their classmates in small group discussions. Students were encouraged to participate in the learning process by reflecting on their activities and thereby building their metacognitive knowledge (Cotterall & Murray, 2009).

The first two weeks were an important time filled with preliminary assignments. In one sense, these assignments were a way for us to understand who our students were, but, in another sense, they were also a way for the students to reflect on themselves as language learners. By stressing this rationale and asking students to do so much work at the beginning of the term, they could better appreciate the importance of completing their learning tasks. In the first week, students were asked to complete the following assignments:

- Learner Profile: This was a 4-page document that had a list of questions related to the language abilities and background of the student. Originally printed out and collected in the classroom, this was digitized and offered as a download to fill in and then upload to Moodle. The students were initially overwhelmed by this extensive survey but understood that it was important for both the teacher and

student to know their language learning background, their strengths and weaknesses, and what they hoped to achieve in the class.

- Language Beliefs Survey (LBS): This survey was crucial to give in the first week in order for students to build awareness of their own beliefs about how they learn (Appendix A). It consisted of 20 statements that students rated using a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The idea was to give the same survey to the students at the end of the term again to see if their beliefs changed in six weeks. Being able to see some differences helped students build awareness of their views on language learning, even though it was in a short span of time.

- Language Learning History: Students wrote a short essay about their experiences of learning a second language. They could focus on how they first heard or studied English and write about any anecdotes of favorite English teachers or situations where they came in contact with English. We wanted students to reflect on their language learning up to this point.

In the second week, students had to submit:

- Anticipated Future Language History: In this essay, students were asked to write about what they thought their lives would be like 10 years from now. What kind of job would they be doing? Would they be using English at all? Would they be living in Japan or another country? This was a difficult assignment for some students, but it helped them imagine the possibilities of how English could become a part of their future lives and careers. By imagining their future, we hoped that students would consider their *Ideal L2 Selves* (Dörnyei, 2009) as a motivator for the course.

- Personal Learning Plan (PLP): This is one of the most important documents that students had to fill out. It outlines their goal for the course and which materials they plan to use in order to reach that goal. This was also a difficult task because students needed to be aware that their goal had to be manageable and specific, which could be reached after a few weeks.

These two weeks of assignments not only helped us become familiar with each student's goals and potential for learning, but it helped students develop a reflective practice that continued for the next six weeks of the course. By encouraging students to reflect on their learning activities from week to week, we hoped that they would develop this into a regular habit, even outside of the course.

After students made the PLP for the class and decided on their learning goal, they would spend each week doing activities to reach that goal. Every time they did an activity, they would fill out a Learning Log (LL). These LLs were an important feature of this course. They were a way for the teacher to keep track of the student's progress each week. In addition, the teacher gave feedback on their learning, made sure the students stayed on course to reach the goal written in their PLP, and guided them to think more deeply about how they were learning. For example, if a student did three activities in one week, they would submit three LLs. We asked that each student spend at least 100 minutes each week on English learning activities.

At the end of the course, students filled out an evaluation form to assess themselves. Giving students a chance to be a part of the decision-making process to assess their performance in the course helps promote their learner autonomy (Cotterall, 2021). Students reflect on the strategies they have learned and used during the eight weeks of the course to find what fits their learning style the best. In this way, we hoped that students would continue using these skills and ultimately become lifelong learners of English.

Moving the classes online in 2020 added another hurdle to overcome. As the teachers worked to convert the course, they faced a number of issues. For example, how could students hand in their assignments? How could teachers monitor their activities? How would they make sure that students were getting enough opportunities to use what they learned?

3 Adapting to an Online Course: The Issues

When the university administration made the decision to change all classes to an online format, our first

reaction regarding the ISC course was that it would be an easy transition. Students could take the course from any location, be it in Japan or overseas. In fact, many of the assignments listed above had already become digitized when the course was shortened from 15 weeks to 8 weeks. First, a Google Form was created for students to submit each LL every time they studied. By using the Google Form, we could give quick and immediate feedback to students as they progressed in the course. Previously, students filled out a Learning Log form by hand, in which they had to write which materials they used, how long they used them, their activities in detail, and reflections on the effectiveness of the material (Appendix B). The teacher would collect the LLs, make comments, and return them to the students a week later. This meant there was a two-week lag between the log of the activity and feedback from the teacher.

The benefit of using Google Forms for students to submit their LLs was that there was a date and time stamp of when the student submitted the form. If a student was not fulfilling the minimum requirement of studying for the week or was not filling out the LL properly, the teacher could provide immediate feedback. The LL submissions were collated into a Google Spreadsheet and shared with each student. Within a Google Spreadsheet, we could add a separate worksheet for each week of LLs, organized chronologically, so that students could easily view their progress throughout the term. The teacher also had a historical track of each student's progress and could provide feedback every week to make sure all students were comprehensively working towards their PLP goals. For these reasons, having students submit their LLs digitally was more efficient and easier to monitor. However, some students found that having to type their LLs on the computer in English after every activity was somewhat tedious and time-consuming.

The next challenge was utilizing Moodle, the LMS set up by the university. We had to make sure that students accessed it each week to check for assignments and lesson plans. By submitting all assignments through Moodle, we were able to make the course paperless and environmentally friendly. We provided instruction in Moodle using audio, video, and digitally based reading, which students could access at any time. Having this content available on-demand was a valuable resource for students to refer to beyond the course itself.

Another issue we faced was how to offer guidance and support to our students online. Each teacher decided on their own approach. One teacher made the course mostly asynchronous by creating weekly instructional videos and meeting on Zoom for the first, middle, and last classes. When students had a question or there was a lag in independent study from the student's weekly learning logs, the teacher contacted the student and individual sessions on Zoom were scheduled to discuss issues and suggest solutions. The other teacher met her students on Zoom every week for the first 20-30 minutes of the class period. During this time, a strategy was introduced or students had group discussions to share their learning activities and materials they found interesting. The teacher would then let students leave the Zoom session so they could study independently. If anyone had any questions or concerns, the teacher would be available to advise.

The final issue was how students would submit their portfolios. In the traditional classroom, students put their assignments, such as the PLP, LLs, vocabulary logs, their self-evaluation report, and any other materials as evidence of their learning in a file folder to submit to the teacher for assessment. This was not possible once classes went online, so we digitized the portfolio in two ways. One teacher used Google Sites and had students create their own portfolio site which they shared with the teacher. Google Sites is a free web application available in Google and allows users to create an online portfolio which can include photos, documents, and website links. Students can personalize their site by choosing the design and types of pages within it. The teacher gave detailed instructions on how to create a Google Site, but it was still a difficult task for many of them. The hope was that the knowledge gained from building a Google Site would come in useful in the future after students graduated and went into the workplace.

Another teacher made a folder in Google Drive for each student and asked them to submit their materials directly into the folder. Google Drive is a file storage service in which students can share and store their documents. All students at the university are given a university Gmail account which

includes Google Drive and other Google applications. However, even though this service was readily available to the students, it was still a steep learning curve for them. Students were familiar with using SNS applications, but many were unfamiliar with the services that Google provides, such as file storage and document sharing. With the guidance and assistance of the teacher, students became familiar with uploading, organizing, and sharing their portfolio content, making it easily accessible to the teacher.

We believe that in the short amount of time we had to convert the ISC to a completely online course, we were able to develop our students' self-directed learning by instructing them on how to use the technology effectively. Although sometimes it seemed that no matter how many times we explained how to use, for example, Google Sites, some students had great difficulty grasping the concept. We learned to be patient and helpful by putting aside extra time to work with these students on Zoom. With careful support and encouragement from the very beginning by showing them how to maneuver the Google applications, we wanted to give students the framework to organize their activities in a way that fits their learning styles. As well, each teacher could maintain their own autonomy in meeting the challenges of introducing the online materials by finding ways that suited their style.

4 Rationale for an Online Course

We encountered a few obstacles with the transition from face-to-face to online teaching/learning, however, we were able to overcome these and feel that the Independent Study Course can be taught successfully as an online course. Giving ample explanation at the beginning of the course and being readily available on Zoom or by email for help and guidance can ease the students' minds. In fact, it might seem surprising to know that online learning has been around for over twenty years and conducted in lieu of in-class learning (Heo et al., 2021). One of the main reasons why online courses started was as an alternative for students who could not get to a physical classroom. In the US, before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, of the 300 higher education institutions that were surveyed, 88% offered online courses (Venable, 2021). In Japan, this trend was not embraced in the same way as countries with a similar GDP. Online learning programs were sometimes looked at as a way for Japan to encourage international students to study abroad in Japan (Fujimoto et al., 2018). When the pandemic forced most university classes to go online, educators in Japan saw this as an opportunity to show that some courses, depending on their learning goals, could be more successful in an online format than in a classroom. The Independent Study Course (ISC) was created for students to be able to take charge of their own learning by deciding their own goals and finding materials and activities to reach those goals. With sufficient guidance from the teachers, this can easily be accomplished in an online format.

Online learning is not a simple crossover of a face-to-face syllabus. Teachers and students need to be aware of other factors when teaching and learning online. Especially with autonomous learning, students need three additional key competencies – time management, learner engagement, and technology use – to be successful (Heo et al., 2021). In the following paragraphs, each competency is explained in more detail to show that the ISC fulfills the criteria to make it into a successful online course.

Time management, the first competency, is key to autonomous learning. Time management can be defined as the process of organizing and planning how to divide your time between different activities. When time management concerns learning, the level of procrastination is a major factor in determining how well a student can manage their time (Michinov et al., 2011). In ISC, by filling in the Learning Logs and monitoring their progress, students can keep track of their time and reflect on their learning, as well as form a habit of studying on a regular basis, thereby reducing their frequency of procrastination. In addition, Michinov et al. (2011) suggested that providing continual feedback from the instructor was an essential component to increase student motivation and to encourage them

to be active in their learning process. In the ISC, if written feedback did not result in any changes or awareness in the student of their progress, an online one-on-one meeting was scheduled to provide more personalized guidance.

The second competency, learner engagement, also plays a large part in the development of autonomous learning. Students must choose materials and activities that they find interesting and engaging. They must also make specific language learning goals to improve their skills. Learner engagement online gives students more freedom to choose their own materials. This freedom allows the students to be more motivated and thus participate more actively in the learning process. Most online resources today are available at no cost, which can have a positive economic impact on the student (Lederman, 2020). The ISC course satisfies this engagement criterion as they can readily find materials that interest them. They then actively self-assess their work and progress, thereby increasing motivation to continue learning (Cotterall, 2021).

The third competency is technology use. This includes understanding the basic functions of the computer, how to access the internet, and knowing how to search for resources online. In our experience up to now, the student makeup of the ISC has been mostly first-year students who have not taken an online course, used online resources for language learning, or used a computer regularly for educational purposes. In the first lessons of ISC, we have had to introduce a list of useful websites, updated regularly, to raise awareness of available English language resources (Appendix C). This important awareness allows the students to "gain the realization that they possess the ability to change the (traditional) way they learn" (Curry et al., 2017, p. 19). We also made instructional videos on how to use certain technologies for the digital portfolios that students could refer to whenever they had difficulty.

Many of the weaknesses of online learning concern lack of self-discipline and the feeling of isolation which lead to a decrease in motivation (Gorbunovs et al., 2016). Self-discipline is defined as "correction or regulation of oneself for the sake of improvement" (Merriam-Webster online, 2022). Students taking the ISC need to learn self-discipline by determining their own goals to study English and make a plan on how to reach their goals. When making their plan, they need to think about when they can study, for how long, and what materials will be used. This process can be difficult for some students, especially in their first year at university, to carry out initially on their own. We think, therefore, that it is important for the teacher to guide and encourage students to become more self-disciplined.

Another weakness of online learning is the feeling of isolation. This isolation can be caused by inadequate feedback from the teacher or insufficient communication between classmates. The feeling of loneliness or separation from others can be especially demotivating for students. It was, therefore, important for the teachers to ensure that they were readily available and willing to help students whenever assistance was needed. When the ISC moved online, the feedback time from the teacher to the student of their Learning Logs and reflections improved drastically from the face-to-face course. When students submit their LLs online, the teacher can monitor in real time how the student is progressing and give immediate feedback. On the other hand, if a student has not completed any LLs, the teacher is able to see this as well and can contact the student immediately. By making contact with the student quickly with immediate advice or praise, they will not feel isolated. In addition, during the term, the teacher can make time during the class period for students to talk to each other online in breakout rooms to discuss challenges and successes in their independent study and personal learning goals.

We feel that the ISC can easily be implemented as an online course incorporating the factors of time management, learner engagement, and technology use. However, upon analyzing the results of the course evaluations, we found that there was a divide between students who preferred a face-to-face and online format. The next section gives an overview of the challenges we faced.

5 Student Reflections on the Online Format

At the end of the ISC, we asked students to fill out a course evaluation (Appendix D). The responses from the evaluation helped us determine which activities or strategies the students found useful. It was also a way for us to gauge whether students were more aware of managing their own learning and becoming more autonomous. The evaluation consisted of 14 statements, using a 6-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). There were also, initially, three open-ended questions asking for more detailed responses. The 14 statements ranged from student awareness items, such as "In this course I learned about myself as a language learner" to course evaluation items, such as "I would prefer it if the teacher gave us a grade rather than ask us to evaluate our own learning." The open-ended questions gave the students an opportunity to add more details to the Likert scale statements. The questions were purposefully general to allow students to write freely. The three open-ended questions were:

15. What did you like about this course?

16. What could the teacher do to improve this course?

17. What were the most important things you learned in this course?

An additional question was included from the latter part of 2020 asking whether students preferred a face-to-face or online format. This question was added when previous course evaluations indicated that students had a positive reaction to the ISC course being online.

Overall, survey responses over the past four terms did not reveal any noticeable changes from previous years about the course content itself, even though the course went from face-to-face to online. Some positive course evaluation responses ranged from "I can choose the materials myself," "I can study at my own pace," "I like that I can focus on the skills I want to develop," and "I can learn by myself." The question about course improvement (#16) resulted in answers that mostly related to the course content itself as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Types of Responses to Question 16 of Independent Study Course Evaluation

Question 16: What could the teacher do to improve this course?	Number of Responses
Positive feedback about the course	20
Teacher feedback issues	9
Technical online issues	7
More zoom / synchronous classes	2
Student level of English low / hard to follow the teacher	2
Provide a follow up course	1
Face to face course	1

We can see from the results of this question that most students had a positive opinion of the course and the goals. The areas of improvement had to do with technical online issues and providing feedback on student work. The technical online issues are mainly related to setting up the portfolio. As mentioned previously, a few students had difficulty understanding how to create their online portfolio and especially understanding how to share materials with the teacher. If the student did not share their work, the teacher could not gain access to view it. This caused delays and extra time was needed to instruct those students who were having trouble.

Some issues regarding teacher feedback had to do with the Learning Logs and giving examples. Even though we explained and made instructional videos on how to write the LLs at the beginning of the term, some students had trouble filling in the information in detail. One reason for this could be due to their lack of English skills. The LLs had to be written in English, so, for some, this was time consuming. For students

who liked doing the same type of activity, such as reading while listening to news stories, we encouraged them to copy and paste the strategies they used from one LL to another. Of course, the summary of the story and reflections would be different each time. Another suggestion in the evaluation had to do with more examples of effective materials. This was difficult for us because there were only six or seven lessons where we could spend time sharing materials and strategies with them. The group discussions, however, proved to be an effective way for students to share with each other activities they enjoyed doing.

The additional open-ended question regarding whether students preferred the class to be held face-to-face or online revealed that, out of 59 responses, 37 stated remaining online was best. Table 2 shows a list of some reasons students gave for keeping the online course format.

Table 2

Responses to Open-ended Question Regarding Online vs. Face-to-face Lessons

Reasons in favor of Online Course	Number of Responses
can study at own pace / more free time to study	16
working mainly online is easier	6
the course is better not in classroom / easier to learn at home	3
don't need a live lecture to learn every week	2
even online we can talk to classmates	2
focus on independent study	2
technology lets me learn online	1
as long as explanations are clear	1
easy to understand	1
enjoyable online	1

Conversely, the majority of those who responded in favor of face-to-face classes gave responses related to their social life and not the actual course content. Some students stated that face-to-face classes gave them an opportunity to meet new people and make friends. The ISC is open to students from any faculty, so taking the class together is a good opportunity for them to meet students from different disciplines. Another point about the benefits of a face-to-face class was the issue of dealing with questions or problems. Many students felt that face-to-face interactions with the teacher or with their classmates were the best way to solve issues or have questions answered quickly. Interestingly, students in favor of online classes also stated that being online was the best way to have questions answered, saying that an immediate response was possible. In Moodle (the LMS), there is an open forum module where students could freely write a question for everyone to see and respond to. Whenever a student or the teacher posted a question or comment, the message was promptly sent to everyone enrolled in the course, allowing responses to be made swiftly.

The majority of the responses showed that there was educational value to the ISC being online. Uploading materials to Moodle made it easy for students to access. Students could work at their own pace and on their own time, regardless of when the actual class was scheduled during the week. These characteristics indicate that the ISC fulfills the online course competencies of time management, learning engagement, and technology use as outlined by Heo et al. (2021).

6 Discussion

From a pedagogical point of view, the Independent Study Course is an ideal introductory course for

students to develop their autonomous learning skills. We followed the basic structure and philosophy of the self-directed learning course developed by Murray (2009). Murray created the course to provide an arena for students to be introduced to various learning strategies, and then choose what they felt would help them improve their English skills. In the same fashion, through the ISC, students learned how to set their own learning goals, form regular study habits, and reflect on their work. The teacher acted as facilitator and advisor, rather than as a traditional instructor, to guide students through the discovery of the benefits of self-reflection and learning about themselves, which can lead to a lifelong habit of language learning.

As to what would be the best way to deliver this course, we stated earlier that an online format would be the most effective and easiest, as an instructor, to administer. However, we realize that we need to accommodate a variety of learning styles, so we propose two approaches, hybrid and online, to teaching ISC in the future.

6.1 Hybrid version: Face-to-face using an LMS

Although COVID-19 will not disappear in the foreseeable future, many universities in Japan are slowly returning to face-to-face classes. In keeping with the university policies, we could offer ISC as a face-to-face class while providing a totally digital environment for materials, such as assignments, surveys, and explanations of learning strategies, by uploading everything to the LMS. The face-to-face portion of the class could be used to deliver short mini-lessons on strategies, for example, on how to use TV shows, movies, or music to study English, or improving reading and listening skills. Time could also be spent having small group discussions so students can share their ideas and activities that work best for them. By providing the materials completely online, we can save our resources and make the course paperless. For the rest of the class period, students could work individually on their computers, with the teacher on hand as advisor.

6.2 Online version: Synchronous and asynchronous

An online version of ISC is what we developed through trial and error when the pandemic started in 2020. In the same way as the face-to-face version, we would upload all materials to the LMS. Mini-lessons could be held live on a video conference, such as Zoom, or available as a tutorial video for students to access on-demand. In an online course, students from anywhere in the world could join, giving an opportunity for Japanese students to make friends from other countries. The teacher could plan group discussions in breakout rooms on Zoom, so students could get to know each other virtually.

The younger generation of today is more tech savvy than before, but there is still a steep learning curve in order for students to maneuver the digital content in an online class. Some students have difficulty understanding basic concepts on how to use Google Drive, such as sharing or giving permission to access a document. Time is needed at the beginning of the course to go through some of the fundamental aspects of online technology and teach the necessary terminology in English. Making portfolios in Google Sites was a challenge for some students, even though detailed guidelines were posted in Moodle and a thorough explanation showing examples was given on Zoom. In ISC, whenever students uploaded their documents to their Google Site, they needed to make sure that the teacher could view them by giving permission. This extra step was very important, but many students forgot, which led to a delay in the teacher evaluations. Even though many instructional videos and documents were made, some students found Google Sites to be too difficult. Because of this, one teacher reverted back to the Google Drive Folder portfolio for ease of accessibility for both student and teacher final evaluations. On the whole, we feel that an online Independent Study Course is the way of the future. Students can take charge of their learning with the guidance of the instructor. If they have

questions or are having trouble, the instructor can respond to an email message or schedule a video conferencing session to assist them.

After careful reflection and evaluation of the student surveys, we found some improvements to adopt for future online courses such as the ISC. To start with, there is a need to evaluate the course content and the students' readiness for learning, in terms of their characteristics and goals of the course. Students must also be ready for the online experience with knowledge of technology and capabilities for online learning at the very beginning of the course (Dray et al, 2011). One approach would be to give a short diagnostic survey with questions or statements assessing the students' knowledge of and accessibility to technology in the first lesson. By understanding how prepared students are for an online class, we can make appropriate adjustments to the curriculum and help students who may need extra attention and monitoring to guarantee their success in the course.

Other factors which must be considered when arranging the curriculum for an optimum online course are the types of access to digital technology that students are exposed to (van Dijk, 2002). We normally assume that all students have access to a computer and an internet connection, which is considered one facet of access, but van Dijk (2002) suggests that there are four types of access to be considered:

- Mental access: To what degree do students have computer anxiety or motivation to use digital technology?
- Material access: Do students have enough hardware to participate in the course (e.g., computer, Wi-Fi, microphone, and video camera)?
- Skills access: Do students have enough information and knowledge to navigate the technology for learning?
- Usage access: Do students have the opportunity to use the relevant applications and software needed for learning?

These criteria must be added to the online readiness survey at the beginning of the course for teachers to evaluate students and determine if extra support is needed.

7 Conclusion

Through the trials and tribulations of adapting the Independent Study Course to an online format, we found that there are still adjustments that could be made to offer more fulfilling and suitable materials to the students. With the appropriate training and guidelines given to both students and teachers, the ISC can provide a valuable platform for students to discover what is digitally available to support their autonomous language learning.

The pandemic has been a life changing event for everyone and it has forced us, as teachers, to create a curriculum focusing on online technology without any prior preparation or reflection. The past two years have been a learning opportunity to explore and evaluate the way we teach, as well as an opportunity to consider the benefits that can be obtained from an online format based on the course goals. We must understand that there are many pedagogical variables to consider when teaching online courses. Different from the classroom, teachers need to take into account how students manage their time, how engaged they are in their learning, and the degree of digital knowledge and support they have. These factors can be monitored in the ISC both synchronously and asynchronously, and "allow students to decide for themselves what, when, how and where they learn" (Higher Education Academy, 2015).

When thinking about the digital technology side, we have to consider student accessibility. It is not enough that they have material access, meaning a computer and internet connection. We need to consider students' mental access, their skills access, and user access as well. By recognizing and prioritizing these variables, we can create and streamline an Independent Study Course better designed and implemented for an online learning environment.

Appendix A

Language Beliefs Survey Questions

Students responded using a Likert scale:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

Statements	Scale
1. I am willing to spend a lot of time learning English.	
2. I can imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English fluently in the future.	
3. Studying English is important to me because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.	
4. I always look forward to English classes.	
5. I have my own ways of measuring how much I have learned.	
6. I can't learn English without a teacher.	
7. I can imagine myself living abroad and having a discussion in English.	
8. I usually can tell when my English is improving.	
9. I think learning English is important because the people I respect want me to learn English.	
10. The things I want to do in the future require me to use English.	
11. I can identify my strengths and weaknesses as a language learner.	
12. I can honestly say that I am doing my best to learn English.	
13. I would like to study English even if it were not required.	
14. I know what I need to do to learn English.	
15. I have to study English because my parents will be disappointed if I don't speak English fluently.	
16. I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends or colleagues.	
17. It will have a negative impact on my life if I don't learn English.	
18. I can imagine myself writing English e-mails fluently.	
19. Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English.	
20. I really enjoy learning English.	

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Appendix B

Learning Log

The items below were originally given to students on paper in report form. This was changed to an online format using Google Forms:

1. Time on task (How long did you spend on the activity?)

2. Name of web site and materials used (e.g., book title, magazine title and issue date, URL, etc.) NOTE: If it was an L-cafe lesson, write the date and time of the lesson as well as the teacher name, if you remember.

3. Activities (Specifically, what did you do? Write in as much detail as possible. Remember that I CANNOT see you work, so you must tell me what you are doing!)

4. What new vocabulary words or expressions did you learn? Write some examples. (max 5) [If you added words to Quizlet, make a note here.]

5. Reflection / Comments (e.g., How did you like this? What did you learn? Did this activity help you reach your PLP goal? What will you do next time to improve?)

6. Planning: (What will you do next time and when? Planning ahead makes you think about studying.)

Appendix C

	Title	URL	Description
no 1	ABC Radio Australia	http://www.abc.net.au/radio/	Audio news and programming from Australia. This site is native-speaker level.
no 2	American English Pronunciation Practice	http://www.manythings.org/pp/	A fun page to practice pronunciation.
no 3	BBC British Broadcasting Corporation	http://www.bbc.co.uk/	Audio news and programming from Britain. This site is native-speaker level.
no 4	BBC Learn English	http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/ learningenglish/index.shtml	A good place to learn British English.
no 5	Breaking News English	http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/	Ready-to-use ESL/EFL lessons with listening activities. Uploaded daily.
no 6	Destination Hollywood	http://destinationhollywood.com/movies	Provides short video clips of movies with script.
no 7	Digital Cast-Online Information Service	http://digitalcast.jp/	This site is designed for Japanese learners of English. You can improve your vocabulary and listening skills from selected songs and TED Talks.
no 8	English Central	http://www.englishcentral.com/ja/videos	Practice your listening and speaking skills by watching segments of videos and recording your voice.
no 9	English Language Listening Lab Online	https://elllo.org/index.htm	ESL/EFL listening activities downloadable MP3 audio files, transcripts and interactive quizzes. Uploaded weekly.
no 10	ESOL Courses	http://www.esolcourses.com/	Free English lessons online (British English)
no 11	Learning English (example)	http://www.youtube.com/user/ MinooAngloLink	Listening strategies
no 12	Lingual Net	http://www.lingual.net/lingualproductitems/	Learn English by watching movies. Each movie comes with a built-in quiz.
no 13	Lyrics Training	https://lyricstraining.com/	Improve your listening skills by watching music videos and filling in the missing words on the screen. You can choose from four different levels. Sign in required, but it is free.
no 14	MedLine Plus	https://medlineplus.gov/anatomyvideos.html	Good for medical students
no 15	NHK World Radio Japan	http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/	Current events and news around Japan. You can watch videos while reading the text to improve your listening and reading skills.
no 16	NPR National Public Radio	http://www.npr.org	Audio news and programming from the United States. This site is native-speaker level.
no 17	Okadai English website	http://www.okadaienglish.com	This has a variety of websites and ideas for improving your English.
no 18	Radio Canada International	http://www.rcinet.ca/english/	Audio news and programming from Canada. This site is native-speaker level.
no 19	Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab	http://www.esl-lab.com	Free site, with over 150 audio and video activities to help English learners improve their listening comprehension.
no 20	Story Corps	https://storycorps.org/	Stories on audio with transcripts of ordinary people. This site is native-speaker level.
no 21	TED lectures	http://www.ted.com	Lectures on a variety of topics. This site is native-speaker level.
no 22	This American Life	http://www.thislife.org	A popular radio program from the U.S. This site is native-speaker level.
no 23	Voices of America Learning English	http://www.voanews.com/learningenglish/ home/	A good place to hear simple news in English.
no 24	www.ManyThings.org	http://www.manythings.org	A fun study site for students of English as a Second Language.
no 25	You Tube	http://youtube.com	Search: English Listening practice ; or, Learning English

Note: Recommended

Appendix D

Independent Study Course evaluation questions

This survey was given to students at the end of the course:
Likert-scale items (Strongly disagree 1 – Strongly agree 6)

1. In this course I learned about myself as a language learner. このコースを通して、英語学習者としての自分について自覚が高まった。

2. I set meaningful and realistic goals for myself. 自分にとって重要かつ現実的な目標を設定することができた。

3. I enjoyed this course. このコースは楽しかった。

4. I found this course to be a waste of time. このコースは時間の無駄だった。

5. I put more effort into my work because I knew I would be deciding what grade I got. 自分で自分の成績をつけることになると知っていたので、それだけより一層努力をした。

6. In this course I made progress toward achieving the goals I set for myself. このコースを通して、自分で設定した目標に少しでも近づくことができた。

7. The materials and strategies I chose helped me meet the goals I set. 自分で選んだ教材と学習方法は、自分で設定した目標を達成するのに役立った。

8. My English has improved because of the work I did in this course. このコースで学習することによって自分の英語力が伸びたと感じる。

9. I like it better when the teacher tells me exactly what to do and what to learn. 具体的に何をどう学べばよいのか先生からはっきりと指示が与えられる方がよい。

10. I made good use of my time in this course. このコースでは時間を有効に使うことができた。

11. I do not understand why I should have to set goals for myself. 何故自分で目標を設定しなくてはならないのか理解できない。

12. Being free to choose materials and decide how I would use them motivated me to do good work in this course. このコースでは自由に教材を選びその使い方も自分で決められたので、成果をあげたいという意欲が高まった。

13. I would like to have more time for this course. このコースの時間をもっと増やしてほしい。

14. I would prefer it if the teacher gave us a grade rather than ask us to evaluate our own learning. 自分の学習を自分で評価するよりも、先生に成績をつけてもらったほうがよい。

Open-ended questions:
15. What did you like about this course?
16. What could the teacher do to improve this course?
17. What were the most important things you learned in this course?
18. Do you think this class is better in the classroom (face-to-face) or online? Please write your reasons.
19. If you have any other comments, please write them here:

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