Reflections on Online Teaching under the Covid-19 Pandemic—
Taking the International Chinese Language Program
at Macao Polytechnic Institute as an Example

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Abstract: As the world has been going through the unprecedented challenges caused by Covid-19 pandemic, so has the online teaching, which has been replacing traditional bricks-and-mortar teaching during the period of "suspending classes without suspending learning" globally. Having tried such large-scale online teaching for four months for the first time in over three decades of teaching, the author has also gone through the unprecedented challenges, caused by her lack of experience and skills in online teaching, as well as problems of lack of students' self-discipline and lower effectiveness of online teaching and learning, etc., which have encouraged the author to think deeply. Since the Covid-19 still rages through the whole world, and the severe pandemic makes the global online teaching likely to continue in the near future when the new academic year begins, this paper is a reflection of the author on her online teaching experience and understanding, from which she tries to figure out how to make her coming online teaching better, how to combine the traditional face-to-face class along with online teaching in the future.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, interaction, Macao Polytechnic Institute, motivation, online teaching, suspending classes, teaching methodology

1.   Introduction

Last December in China, the outbreak of Covid-19 and the world's hugest Chinese migration ahead of the Chinese New Year made the epidemic turn more and more severe. In order to effectively stop the virus from spreading, and protect the lives of students and teachers, on the evening of January 27th this year, the Ministry of Education of China issued a notice that the spring semester of 2020 would be postponed until further notice. Students returning to their hometowns during the Spring Festival, should not return to their schools in advance without schools' approval. [1] Therefore, all the colleges and universities under the Ministry of Education postponed the start date of the 2020 spring semester. On the 29th of January, the Ministry of Education launched an initiative, named "suspending classes without suspending learning" (停課不停學), intended to provide online teaching to the students during the shutdown of the schools. In order to fully guarantee that teachers and students could teach and learn online successfully, the Ministry of Education coordinated and integrated a variety of high-quality online teaching resources for schools.[2]

With the rapid spread of Covid-19, on the 22nd of January, the first confirmed case of Covid-19 was reported in Macao. As the 2020 spring semester, after the Chinese New Year's break would be resumed very soon, on the 30th of January, the government of the Macao S.A.R. announced that all schools would be closed indefinitely. Meanwhile, the

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[1] Retrieved from: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-01/27/c_1125506608.htm
[2] Retrieved from: http://bj.people.com.cn/n2/2020/0130/c82841-33751225.html

Macau Higher Education Bureau called on all Macao's higher education institutions to complete their teaching arrangements online or carry out distance education during schools' suspension period to avoid mass gatherings.

In response to that, on the 3rd of February, the first school day of the 2020 spring semester after the Chinese New Year's break, Macao Polytechnic Institute (MPI)[3], where the author works, began with its large-scale online teaching, by using the platform of Canvas to ensure that the academic performance of students wouldn't be affected.   Very soon, MPI's teachers received the emails from the institute's Information Technology Department to be provided with guidance and Canvas-related online tutorials.

As a teacher, in the program of Bachelor of Arts in International Chinese Language Education to non-native speakers of Chinese at MPI, two of the author's courses, Listening and Speaking of Intermediate Chinese II and Listening and Speaking of Advanced Chinese II were courses for training students' Chinese language skills, and the aim of them was to focus on the practical training of students' skills in listening and speaking by providing various kinds of drills and activities in class. At the beginning of online class, the teaching and learning environment suddenly changed from familiar bricks-and-mortar classrooms to unfamiliar virtual ones, which caused great inconvenience and challenges to both the teacher and the students, who couldn't have face-to-face conversations in class as before. As we know, the dialogue or conversation between teachers and students in class is the best way for students to get the help from their teachers directly, and it is also the best opportunity for teachers to teach in different methods according to students' different aptitudes and requests (Feng, Liu, Zhu & Yan, p. 139). In the meantime, some other challenges were also posed by network facilities, design of online teaching platforms, students' motivations in online learning, etc.

2.   Challenges for Teachers and Students

By providing online teaching and learning, the scheme of "suspending classes without suspending learning" (停課不停學) has been implemented all over the world during the epidemic period, and it has likely become the biggest educational experiment in human history. As the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world in an unexpected way, the scheme of online teaching and learning were proposed in an unexpected and unprepared way for many teachers and students. Therefore, in response to the request for organizing online teaching, both teaching management teams and teachers were faced with many challenges (Zhang, 2020, p. 51), as were most of the students, who were unused to the sudden change from traditional face-to-face instruction to online learning.   The following are some of the challenges the author and students have encountered while implementing online teaching and learning during the pandemic outbreak.

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[3] The short form of "MPI" will be used in the following text instead of Macao Polytechnic Institute.

2.1.   Lack of Theoretical Guidance and Training for Online Teaching

As a teacher who graduated from university decades ago, the author's theoretical guidance and training are abundant except for online teaching. As a Chinese language teacher, who teaches International Chinese to foreign students in classrooms, class drills and activities matter a lot for the author, because they are one of the important ways to help students improve their communication skills in Chinese, as well as their listening, speaking, reading and writing. Zhou (2016, p. 1) argued that Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language is different from teaching Chinese to the native speakers, because it emphasizes enhancing students' Chinese communicative competence, including their verbal communication abilities and skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, the sudden change from the traditional type of teaching, face-to-face instructions, to online teaching was not easy for both the author and her students, who had been used to bricks-and-mortar teaching and learning, and didn't get ready for teaching and learning Chinese online at all. One student told the author that he had no mood to take online lessons, while some of the author's senior colleagues, as well as the author, felt a bit lost at the beginning of online teaching, because seldom had they had this kind of training and experience before, partly due to a lack of understanding and appreciation of the importance of online teaching. According to Zhang and Li (2017, p. 51), the professional qualities of online teachers include comprehensive quality, online teaching ability and professional development ability. Online teaching abilities focus on the teachers' skills in using online platforms, online teaching and application of courseware, which are the cores of professional qualities of online teachers, and the fundamental guarantees for the implementation of online teaching. Wang, Wei and Zhong (2020, pp. 15-19) conducted surveys of 59,156 primary and secondary school teachers in Hubei Province, the worst-hit areas of Covid-19 pandemic, through questionnaires and interviews, and found out that 31.03% of the teachers responded that they had difficulties in using online platforms and tools, while 28.82% of the teachers thought it quite complicated. So did the author. Being a language teacher, the author had to admit that she had difficulties in making her online lessons as interesting, interactive and attractive as her face-to-face class; therefore, she didn't think that she possessed enough professional qualities of online teachers, due to her insufficient online teaching skills.

2.2.   Problems with Students' Self-discipline

Tang and Guan (2020, pp. 27, 28) argued that the online teaching of adult higher education was not satisfactory, because the teachers and students were at a loss when making a sudden transition to online teaching and learning. At the same time, contradictions and conflicts existed between the concepts of online education, quality education, teaching modes, and the implementation of online teaching of adult higher education. Therefore, how to maintain students' motivation for learning, and improve learning efficiency became a major challenge for teachers and students. Due to the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, and the difference between learning at school and online learning, the Education Department of the Macao S.A.R. issued guidance to the schools that online education should be carried out on the premise of not increasing

the pressure of teachers, students and parents.[4] Under the circumstances, online class attendance at MPI was not compulsory, and the attendance rate of some online classes was not high. Taking two of the author's Chinese classes as an example, there were 21 students in Listening and Speaking of Intermediate Chinese II; the attendance rate was about 50%, and the attendees were always those 10 students who attended her online classes on time twice a week. As for her Listening and Speaking of Advanced Chinese II, there were only 5 students, and the attendees were always those 3 students who attended her online classes on time once a week. The author once conducted an oral questionnaire survey on those 26 students in both classes, and found out that only 6 of the students regarded online teaching as effective, and the other students showed their dislike for it. One student even said to the author that he thought online learning was too terrible, and it disrupted his plan for learning hard and making great progress for the second semester before going to Beijing Language and Culture University for the exchange study during their third academic year. A few absentees told the author that their reason for their failing to attend the online class was that they went to bed late at night, and couldn't get up early in the morning to attend their online class. Since whether to participate in their online classes or not was voluntary, the author had no right to force her students to be present in her online classes; therefore, she felt lost and helpless in dealing with her students' absence from her online classes. As mentioned in the research of Wang, Wei and Zhong (2020, pp. 15-19), 82.83% of teachers reported that in online education it was difficult to monitor students' learning remotely. Under the situation of separation of teachers and students in different physical space, the differences of students' learning attitude, self-discipline, and willpower led to some students' poor performance during their online learning. A high school student from State of Kentucky, the U.S.A., described her worries about her online learning at home, "I am worried that if there is no clear timetable for me to wake up at 6 am, I will eventually ignore my homework and advanced placement." (Zhao, 2020). Although this worry came from an American student, it was precisely what some of the author's students were doing when taking their online lessons. They completed their homework at the last moment, even after the deadline, and their academic results were not as good as before. During the period of "suspending classes without suspending learning" (停課不停學), students needed to preview before their online lessons, review after their online lessons, and conduct self-directed learning, which would challenge their self-discipline (Wang et al., 2020, p. 139). Because students, who learnt at home, lacked effective external supervision, they had to learn how to conduct self-management, self-directed learning, and online learning (Yang and Zhang, 2020, p. 5).

2.3.   Lower Effectiveness of Online Teaching and Learning

Tang and Guan (2020, p. 31) believed that teaching effectiveness of online lessons depends largely on students' learner autonomy, which is the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981). Nonetheless, one of the challenges for online lessons was some students' lack of self-discipline, as discussed in Session 2.2 above. Without self-discipline ("the ability to make yourself do things you know you should do even when you do not want to"[5]), students won't have motivation to take charge of

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[4] Retrieved from https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/news/317790/
[5] Retrieved from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/self-discipline

their own learning. That explains why a few of the author's students achieved poorer academic results for their online lessons than they had before. However, everything happens for a reason. The author also reflected on her online teaching methodologies, and had to admit that her online language lessons were not as attractive as her face-to-face lessons due to her lack of online teaching skills, which is one of the important professional qualifications, that distinguishes **online** TCFL (Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) teachers from other TCFL teachers (Zhang & Li, 2017, p. 56). According to the Guide to Teaching Online Courses of the National Education Association (NEA), U.S.A., Xiong and Min (2014, pp. 112-113) summed up the 6 online teaching skills of online teachers in the U.S.A.: a) skills to design and deliver an online course; b) skills to help students with good preparation; c) skills to organize the online course well; d) skills to use advanced technology; e) skills to enhance online class interaction; f) skills to make reasonable evaluation.

Concerning those 6 skills, required by NEA for online teachers, the author would like to briefly analyze the current situation of online teaching by taking most of her experience as an example.

Online teaching shares much with face to face teaching, but it also has a unique set of skills and requirements if educators are to teach well online (NEA, 2002). Macao is a small city with an area of 32.9km[6], but has 10 higher education institutions. In academic year 2018/2019, there were altogether 34,279 students, including 33,810 full time students and 469 part time students[7] . "Full-time students" refers to those who take full-time courses during the day or night time. The courses are taught face-to-face continuously in the classrooms (Higher Education Bureau, 2020). Hence, face-to-face instruction is the most popular teaching mode in Macao's higher education institutions, including at MPI, which the author has been working in. As a language teacher, the author had greatly enjoyed teaching Chinese, and interacted a lot with her foreign students in classrooms; however, the sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic forced her and her students to teach and learn online without any mental preparation at all. Teaching in the new online space did not mean simply moving from bricks-and-mortar class to online class, but entailed the need to re-design lesson plans and re-establish classroom culture (Yang & Zhang, 2020, p. 5).   At the very beginning, with a great hurry, the author just rushed to transfer her teaching plans and materials to her online platform, Canvas, in accordance with her course outlines and lesson plans. Obviously, in such a great rush, she had no time to think how to "design, deliver, and organize online class, help students with good preparation" (NEA, 2002); therefore, the author believed that was one of the reasons why her students were not as active and interested in her online class as in their bricks-and-mortar class. On the other hand, the author's teaching experience told her that happy, interesting and harmonious classroom interactions with her students are one of the keys to keep the class student-centered, improve students' motivation for learning, enhance effectiveness in classroom teaching, and build good relationship with students. Sher (as cited in Cole, Shelly & Swartz, 2014), in his study of the role such interactions play in student learning in a Web-based environment, found interaction between student and instructor and among students to be significant factors in student satisfaction and learning. As we know that the biggest feature of online teaching is the "separation of teaching and learning" between teachers

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[6] Retrieved from https://www.dscc.gov.mo/zh-hant/geo_statistic_web1.html#scroll
[7] Retrieved from https://www.dses.gov.mo/about/depart/intro

and students (Shen, 2015, p. 67), it is relatively less easier to interact with students in online class than in classrooms, where interaction between teachers and students can be achieved through both non-verbal and verbal communication in classrooms (Song, 2018, p. 8). Furthermore, from the view of Tang and Guan (2020, p. 31), teaching interaction is the most important element of online teaching.   With the development of concepts for teaching interaction, interaction among students in the teaching and learning process has attracted much attention.   From the author's online teaching experience, it was more difficult for students to interact with each other in online class, and the author thinks one of the reasons was that the teacher lacked experience in making her online class interactive between teachers and students, students and students. In face-to-face class, the author could easily know whether the students could understand the lesson or not by lots of class interactions with her students or looking at students' facial expressions.   However, failure in conducting online class interactions made that kind of class feedback become difficult.   The survey of Wang, Wei and Zong (2020, pp. 15-19) found that 60.24% of teachers had difficulty in knowing students' learning situation, which was an urgent problem to be solved in online teaching.

Because students have unique learning styles, online courses should include activities and assessments that are varied to meet the learning styles of all students (NEO, 2002).   Since it was the first time that such a large-scale online class was launched in the author's school, at that time, the author as well as some other colleagues thought that online class was only a temporary measure to cope with the Covid-19; therefore, for the final examinations of her Intermediate and Advanced Listening and Speaking courses, the author managed to adapt their contents to the need of the online examinations.   Based on the study of Li, Liu, Xie, Wang, Zhang and Luo (2020), the practice of online teaching inevitably encounters some problems; for instance, there are no standard specifications for assessments, which has caused many students to think that after learning their teaching contents, they will have completed their study. Given that circumstance, it is very difficult for teachers to know to what extent their students have mastered their learning materials.

Online teaching is one of the forms of distance education (Tang and Guan, 2020, p. 29) As early as in 1996, the Distance Education scholars, Abrami and Bures, pointed out that no matter what kind of learning environment a learner had, interaction was the key factor to guarantee effective learning. From the perspective of learners, Moore, the Distance Education expert, proposed three types of interactions in the learning process, including interactions between learners and course contents, learners and teachers, learners and learners (Yue, 2016, p. 16). Owning to the author's lack of experience in conducting those three kinds of interactions in online teaching, she had to admit that was likely one of the reasons why many of her students had no motivation for online learning, and why the learning effectiveness was not high. Meanwhile, in the author's opinion, the low learning effectiveness of students doubtlessly affected the author's motivation for teaching as well as her teaching effectiveness, since the three factors — students, teachers, teaching contents, were complementary to each other, and affected each other.

2.4.   Problems with Time Differences, Networks and Computers

Most of the students from MPI's International Chinese Education program (for non-native speakers) came from Portuguese-speaking countries, such as Brazil, Portugal,

Cape Verde, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe. During the early outbreak of the epidemic, 7 students chose to return to their home countries, Cape Verde and Mozambique. The time differences between Cape Verde and Macao, Mozambique and Macao were 9 hours and 6 hours respectively; therefore, the online classes had to be arranged in two slots, one in the mornings for the students in Macao, the other in the evenings for those who went back home, so the problem of time differences was solved. Regarding the problems of network and computers, the students in Cape Verde and Mozambique still used mobile phones with 3G networks instead of computers to take online lessons, so that the author had to switch from the Zoom conference at Canvas, which required a strong network, to WeChat voice system. In that case, the communication between the author and the students became blind; thus the interaction was severely affected, and even though the online class could be kept on, it was less effective.

3.   Solutions to Challenges

The outbreak of Covid-19 made online teaching become the main teaching mode to support the scheme of "Suspending classes without suspending learning" (停課不停學) so that students could learn at home or hostel without going to school. In the meantime, the sudden launch of online teaching made the teachers, like the author, who had seldom tried online teaching before, come across many challenges. They got to learn how to face up to them, cope with them and improve their online teaching while giving their online lessons. In spite of the challenges caused during the period of online class, the author also "tasted" the sweetness of online class, and the more online lessons she gave, the more experience she learnt, and the more she enjoyed it. Besides, with the global outbreak and the unprecedented situation of the pandemic, nobody knows how long it will take for Covid-19 to be defeated, so the author thinks it necessary for teachers and the school authority to ponder what has been learnt from this large-scale online teaching experience, and how to do better if online teaching will have to be conducted in the future.

3.1.   Policy Support

In 2019, the central government of China issued the document of China's Education Modernization 2035, proposing to "accelerate the education reform in the information era", adapt to the revolutionary changes in the methods of knowledge acquisition, teaching and learning, caused by the continuous development in information technology, and promote the application of information technology in teaching, management, learning and evaluation (Zhu, 2020, p. 47). Therefore, the development of online teaching is not only the global trend in the information era, but also reflects the need of the national development strategy and education modernization, which should be highly supported by the government's policy in order to develop high-quality online teaching. It has been written in the Guide to Teaching Online Courses by National Education Association (2002) that an effective online education program demands that administrators and policymakers make wise decisions about resource allocation. Just as a traditional classroom teacher should have access to appropriate tools and resources, an online teacher needs certain types of support to succeed.

The government of Macao S.A.R. has always adhered to the policy concepts of "Invigorating Macao through education and building Macao through talents" since Macao's handover to China in 1999.   From 2007 on, 680,000,000 patacas (approximately 85 million US dollars) has been spent on optimizing computer hardware and software, constructing campus network, connecting internet, training teachers, etc., by the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau of Macao S.A.R.[8], which takes charge of Macao's non-tertiary education.   Macao's higher education, taken charge of by the Higher Education Bureau of Macao S.A.R., enjoys a certain degree of freedom, and has advanced computer hardware and campus networks.   For example, at MPI, where the author works, every teacher has been given a lap-top computer by MPI, and at students' hostels, many computers have been installed so that the students have no problems in using computers for online learning during the online teaching period.   However, as for policy support, according to the author's knowledge, the Higher Education Bureau of Macao S.A.R hasn't proposed any specific and helpful policy about online learning education, which has become the most important teaching mode with a key role during the special period of "suspending classes without suspending learning" (停課不停學). Therefore, the author thinks it necessary for the Higher Education Bureau of Macao S.A.R to provide more policy guidance and support to Macao's higher education institutions, as well as special online teaching training to the teachers, most of whom were seen to lack online teaching experience and training during the class suspension.

3.2.   Online Teaching Training

We have been living in the digital age.   No matter whether teachers like it or not, the value and importance of online teaching has been proved during the Covid-19 outbreak. The technology-driven learning model is commonly regarded as a learning and development trend in the 21st century (Zhu, 2020, p. 46).   Luo, Liu, Quan and Yang (2020, p. 64) argued that the multimedia and network, used in teaching, has become one of the characteristics of the modern teaching mode, and network has been an aid for modern teaching model.   On the other hand, the sudden launch of the large-scale online teaching has increased the teachers' awareness and discussion of the use of multimedia and network in online teaching.

As we know online teaching, due to the separation of teachers and students in physical space, should be different from classroom teaching. However, in reality, at the beginning of the online teaching, many teachers, including the author, simply moved the teaching methodologies for bricks-and-mortar class to online class.   Despite the fact that the author found out the problems, and tried to improve her online teaching, the lack of sufficient skills in making full use of multimedia and network technology to make class more interesting and interacting, let her worry a lot.   From the author's experience of the online teaching, she has come to understand the importance and advantages of applying multimedia and network technology into online teaching as well as classroom teaching, she has tried to learn the skills by herself, nonetheless, she still hopes that some systematic and practical training can be provided to teachers, especially those senior ones, who were not born and brought up in the information age, by the school authority. For instance, the I.T. department of MPI, where the author works, can set up a series of workshops for teachers, who need this kind of training.   The research of Zhang and Li

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[8] Retrieved from https://portal.dsej.gov.mo/webdsejspace/site/itedu/index.jsp?con=statistics

(2017, p. 56) pointed out that in order to carry out online teaching in an orderly way, the most fundamental and urgent qualification for teachers is the skills in online teaching and application of courseware, and online teaching training can exactly meet this practical need, which is scientific, reasonable and feasible.

3.3.   Interactive Online Class Activities

As discussed above in Section 2.3, it's more difficult to set up online class activities between teachers and students, students and students than traditional classroom activities, and this kind of difficulty doubtlessly affects the effectiveness of online teaching and learning, especially Chinese language class for foreigners, who need a lot of interactive practice in class. Here the author would like to combine her teaching experience with that of others, as well as her ideas to explore the ways to make her online Chinese class more interactive and attractive in the future.

3.3.1.   Adaptation of Teaching Approaches and Materials

In Section IV of the Guide to Teaching Online Courses of the National Education Association (NEA), U.S.A., it has been emphasized that teachers should be trained to adjust course materials and curricula in order to maximize effective learning. Taking the author's class of Listening and Speaking of Intermediate Chinese II as an example, at her traditional classroom, she used to let every student in turn talk about something about themselves, related to the topic of the lesson as a warm-up activity, in order to add some sense of reality to the class, and arouse students' learning interest. Meanwhile, students' talks frequently caused laughter among the class, and created a kind of harmony and relaxation in the class, which could increase the motivation for teachers' teaching and students' learning. However, in the online class, students couldn't communicate with each other as they had usually done in their classroom, which caused great inconvenience as well as depression for the students and teachers. To solve that problem, the author posted teaching and learning materials for the warm-up activity in the Discussion section on Canvas (MPI's online teaching platform) in advance, about one week before the online class, in order that the students could prepare the questions by themselves, and post their opinions openly to the whole class. Then the author would give her feedback to each post quickly so that every student could read and learn the opinions of their classmates and teacher. As for the listening and speaking class, it is necessary for students to listen to their teachers' pronunciation, read out texts with teachers, and for teachers to correct students' pronunciation when they are reading the new words and texts. Nonetheless, such a simple task was changed into "mission impossible" due to the separation of space and time. At the very beginning of the online class, the author once tried to let her students follow her when reading the new words and texts together, but it was proved to be a failure as they had difficulty in reading out together at the same time in different physical space. In response to that, the author recorded her teaching materials, and uploaded them to Canvas for students to listen by themselves, and have them record their reading, and upload their recording. Then the author would listen to her students' pronunciation, and correct them one by one during the next online class.

3.3.2.   Student-centered Methodology

In 2018, the Ministry of Education of China issued the Action Plan of Education Informatization 2.0, that we should construct a new learner-centered ecology of education, guided by informatization, so as to meet the needs of talents training in the new era and the information society. In the Guide to Teaching Online Courses of the National Education Association (NEA), U.S.A., it was written that in online courses, sole reliance on traditional lecture-based learning is impractical. Instead, teachers should serve as facilitators and educational coaches, designing challenging activities and providing effective guidance and quality feedback (NEA, 2002).

Li and Yang (2019, p. 115) noted that under the background of "Internet Plus[9]", the role of teachers changed from "indoctrinator" of knowledge to supporter of students' learning activities, collaborator, organizer of information resources, and educational researcher. As teachers in the era of "Internet Plus", we all have to follow the trend. Never did the author have such a sense of strong urgency in making the greatest use of computer technology to serve her online teaching as during the period of the epidemic, because she learnt that she couldn't just apply all of her effective traditional classroom activities into her online class, since they didn't work well at all. Having reflected on her online teaching, the author finds that her online class was not as student-centered as her bricks-and-mortar class, which could also make students lose interest in online class. For example, in her bricks-and-mortar class, as a class teacher, the author used to have a free chat with her students to get their feedback about their teaching and learning, then she would provide immediate help, follow-up and improvement; however, the separation of teachers and students in the online class made this simple act extremely difficult.   From the author's experience, she felt that face-to-face communication in a bricks-and-mortar location could easily make the conversation between teachers and students flow freely. Given the circumstances, the author used WeChat to communicate with her students one by one instead of group WeChat so that special attention could be given to every specific student. On the other hand, as the students usually take their final assessments of Listening and Speaking of Intermediate Chinese II separately, considering the special difficulty of a few lower level students, the author gave them some more days to prepare for their online final assessments as an act of encouragement and a personalized design, which was like what Li and Yang (2019, p. 111) said, that online course should be taught with the features of "personalization" and "customization".

3.3.3.   Exploring Online Chinese Teaching Methodology

From the author's understanding, there is lots of research on the methodology for TCFL (Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language), but not much on the methodology for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language Online. Having gone through this pandemic, the author thinks it is high time that all of teachers as well as school authorities took online teaching seriously, and gathered all wisdom to figure out how to improve it, since the Covid-19 still rages through the world, and online teaching will probably continue for some time. On the other hand, having tried the online teaching for the first

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[9] Internet Plus (Chinese: 互联网+), similar to Information Superhighway and Industry 4.0, was proposed by China's Premier Li Keqiang in his Government Work Report on March 5, 2015. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_Plus

time for 4 months, the author's feelings for that changed, from stage 1 "dislike, reject" (due to the lack of experience and skills in online class), stage 2 "accept" (since the author gradually learnt how to use the online platform, Canvas), stage 3 "feel like it" (because the author found out some of the advantages of online class, which couldn't be replaced by face-to-face-class, to the present stage "strong sense for improvement" (since the author understood that her skills, training and online teaching methodology had a lot of space for improvement if she wanted to make her coming online class better).

3.3.3.1.   Making Use of Multimedia and the Internet

Facing enormous information on the internet, the teacher must recognize the importance of various media for study, life and work, and be able to critically understand the communicator's purpose of communication, as well as the contents of the information, teaching students how to select meaningful media software for learning (Li and Yang, 2019, p. 117). The author would like to share her experience in using multimedia and the internet to teach her Portuguese exchange students of Chinese-Portuguese/ Portuguese-Chinese Translation and Interpretation program at MPI. When she was teaching them Chinese Literature online, one lesson was Tea House, written by China's famous litterateur, Lao She[10], the author searched YouTube, found a classic movie, produced by Beijing Film Studio in 1982, as well as a classic drama, played by Beijing People's Art Theatre in 1979, and uploaded them to Canvas for students to watch before they started to learn the text of the drama. "Watching the movie and drama helped me understand the text, and I felt more interested in reading the text because I felt it became easier to read the text," commented one of her students. On the other hand, when she was teaching Listening and Speaking of Advanced Chinese II online, there was a lesson about Chinese cuisine. She found a video about Beijing roasted duck from the internet, and uploaded it to Canvas, then she let her students talk about what they had seen from the video, such as how the roasted duck was made, how it was cut and served to customers, and how they felt about the food. As a result, both the teacher and her students all enjoyed the lesson, because they all liked to eat Beijing roasted duck, and had so much to share with each other online. Thereby, the application of multimedia not only enriched the teaching contents, but also kept students interested in learning in many different ways. (Wang, 2014, p.120)

3.3.3.2.   Flipping Online Class

Flipped classroom is a new kind of educational mode, emerging with the development of "Internet Plus" and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses),[11] and a kind of learning environment, not only making use of information technology to assist teaching and learning, but also providing the in-depth integration of information technology and

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[10] "Lao She (3 February 1899 – 24 August 1966), courtesy name Sheyu, best known by his pen name Lao She, was a Chinese novelist and dramatist. He was one of the most significant figures of 20th-century Chinese literature, and best known for his novel Rickshaw Boy(駱駝祥子) and the play Teahouse (茶館). He was of Manchu ethnicity, and his works are known especially for their vivid use of the Beijing dialect." Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lao_She

[11] A massive open online course (MOOC) is an online course aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the web. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course

curriculum (Shen, 2019, pp. 21, 28). The core idea of "the flipped classroom" is to flip the common instructional approach: With teacher-created videos and interactive lessons, instruction that used to occur in class is now accessed at home, in advance of class. Class becomes the place to work through problems, advance concepts, and engage in collaborative learning (Tucker, 2012). At its core, the flip means shifting the focus from the instructor to the students (Honeycutt & Glova, 2014). Despite it being a new concept for the author, she believes that the student-centered approach of flipped classroom matches the need of online class, and will help with her online class as well as her traditional class. Hence, she has decided to give it a try in her coming academic year, no matter whether in traditional class or online class.

As flipped online class is still at the author's planning stage, she has no real teaching experience; however, she has been encouraged by Shen's (2019, pp. 23-28) ideas in flipped Chinese class, which consists of "three steps" (concentration, student self-learning and lectures reducing), and "ten classroom organization components/processes" (beginning teaching, self-learning feedback, inquiry and guidance, task list discussion, micro-project discussion, project report, interactive comment, classroom reflection, lesson summary and assigning new tasks). The "three steps and ten processes" requires teachers to prepare learning materials and assign online tasks well in advance, and students to learn by themselves thoroughly and take their assigned duties seriously before class, so that teachers and students can focus on problem solving and in-depth discussions when they are together in class or online. Here as an example, the author would like to share one Chinese teacher's experience in flipped online class, which she learnt from the internet. The teacher was going to use the approach of flipped classroom to teach online how to say different colors to her American kids in the U.S.A. She shared a video in which she taught her students how to make a tangram, say the colors, shapes and numbers, then she assigned her students to make a tangram by themselves, and introduce their tangrams in Chinese in a video, made by the students themselves.   In the online class, her students showed and introduced their self-made tangrams, and said the colors and numbers in Chinese; they even tried to make their favorite animals with tangrams. From their online class, students not only learnt different colors and shapes of tangrams, but also how to say various animals in Chinese, which was a great fun and success for the students and the teacher.

3.3.3.3.   Building Strong Teamwork

The Guide to Teaching Online Courses of the National Education Association (NEA), U.S.A. pointed out that online courses should contain small-group activities and team projects where students must collaborate, in order to foster an online community of learners (NEA, 2002).   Guo (2020, p. 5) argued that teachers should try their best to encourage students to learn actively, join collaborative learning, and enquiry-based learning, etc., to help students think for themselves, exchange ideas, share ideas, and so on.

In traditional classrooms, the author used to let students form their own learning groups or complete learning tasks through pair work, role plays or group presentations. For example, when students were learning "Dining Out in a Chinese Restaurant", the author would ask them to form groups and do role plays in the next class. So after class the students would form their learning groups, write out the conversations together, practise by themselves; then at the next class they would play different roles, such as

receptionist, customer, chef, waiter or waitress. Their role plays frequently brought about cheerful laughter in the whole class. Nonetheless, such an awesome team building activity couldn't be carried out in the author's online class since there was a great challenge in making it work due to the separation of time and space. In response to that, the author has been considering how to make this effective teamwork happen again online. If there were online classes again in the coming semester, she would encourage students to form teams, and design more team activities on Canvas, which still needs time and effort for the author to figure out, and she believes being able to collaborate online is also a case of taking an element that can be very effective in the traditional classroom and replicating it in the digital space ("Flipping", 2014).

Meanwhile, not only is teamwork required for students, but also for teachers. the author's online teaching experience, she hopes that instead of working individually and feeling helpless, teachers should form teams as well in order to develop online teaching resources together, since most teachers are not professional in creating them, such as videos, online games, etc. Therefore, a strong team should be built to co-operate with and help each other, and be provided with strong technical support (Lei, 2019, p. 117).

3.3.4.   Prompt Feedback

To develop online teaching, attention must be paid to the real results and impacts on student learning (Zhu, 2020, p. 47) In Tang and Guan's strategic research on online teaching, teachers should collect students' feedback about the teaching methods, class length, students' learning progress, assignments and learning outcomes, etc., from time to time in order to adjust the teaching plans, organize students to share their online learning experience and problems, and stimulate students' motivation for learning (2020, p. 31).

In accordance with the author's experience, the best way to get the students' feedback about online teaching was to communicate with students one by one via WeChat, which sounded time-consuming, but was much more efficient than in group or the whole class. Let me take the students' assignments as an example. The author used to give her students a deadline (one or two weeks) to submit their assignments online or via email, however, it always happened that a few students ignored the deadline, and failed to submit their homework on time. Regarding that, the author would post an online notice on Canvas to remind those students, some of whom didn't even log in to their learning platform, Canvas, for half a month. Therefore, the other option was to contact and remind those students via their individual WeChat. In that case, the author could usually get their positive replies and receive their submissions quickly. On the other hand, not only should students complete their assignments within the deadlines, but teachers should also give their students feedback about their homework promptly. One student wrote to the author that he was grateful for her immediate replies to his notes in Discussion on Canvas, and he thought he had learnt a lot from the discussions between teacher and students, and among students, and he was happy that his Chinese writing had been improved. In the meantime, the author also heard some complaints from students that they couldn't get any feedback about their assignments from their teachers, or the feedback came too late. As a teacher, the author understands the reasons and difficulties in that. Because during the challenging times of the pandemic, teachers spent much more time on online teaching and preparation for online lessons, and it was also a challenging job for a language teacher like the author to give back students'

written assignments online. For instance, in the traditional classroom, after the author corrected the students' Chinese compositions, she would talk to her students about their mistakes and corrections one by one in the classroom, which became difficult in the online class. What she could do was to print out her students' compositions, correct them, scan them, and email to them one by one. Having received their corrected compositions, the students were required to understand the corrections, and ask the author questions if they didn't know. From the author's point of view, all the processes above were long, less efficient and effective, for quite a few students ignored their teachers' corrections. So it's time for the author to think about other better ways to give her students feedback about their assignments in a prompt and effective way.

3.3.5.   Students' Attendance Required

Just as mentioned in the above discussion about students' self-discipline and other problems as well as solutions, the author agrees with Li (2020, p. 30) that efficiency of online teaching will be greatly decreased in comparison with that of traditional class. How to improve the efficiency of teaching depends on how to motivate students to participate in online learning. Motivation in education can have a dramatic impact on students' performance and results ("Why", 2020). That's why the solutions above, discussed by the author, were mainly for teachers to improve students' motivation for online learning. However, according to the author's experience, no matter how she tried to do all her best to make her online teaching better, the truth was that a few students never attended the author's online class, because they knew that online class attendance was not compulsory like their traditional class, which required 70% of the attendance rate for the whole semester at MPI. The absentees told the author that they went to bed very late at night, so they failed to get up for classes in the morning, even when the class was scheduled at 11:00 to 13:00. Regarding that phenomenon, the author thinks it necessary for teachers to take students' attendance into consideration as a kind of external motivation for students to participate in their online class. If the online class continues in the coming academic year, she will consider giving students who attend all the online classes, extra marks as a gesture of encouragement and compliment.

4.   Conclusion

We have all been living in the information era. No matter whether teachers accept it or not, the truth is that our students, the internet generation, were born and brought up in the digital age, their digital skills are usually much better than those of their teachers, including the author, who grew up without computers and the internet. If we don't catch up with the rapid development of information technology, we will be ousted sooner or later by the society, and by our students as well. Furthermore, nowadays the defined lines between online education and face-to-face education are beginning to blur (NEA, 2002) , while the Covid-19 pandemic has made all the teachers know and understand the importance of online education. Teachers have come across many challenges, and tried to learn and find out solutions during the challenging times of the pandemic.
    To solve the problems existing in online teaching, firstly, in order to help teachers become qualified for the new challenge, professional online teaching training and policy support from government and school authorities are necessary and helpful for teachers. Secondly, to motivate students for online learning, teachers should try to adapt their

teaching approaches and methods, design their online teaching in order to achieve the goals of being student-centered, setting up more interactive activities between teachers and students, and among students as well, by exploring online teaching methodology, such as making use of multimedia and the internet, flipping online class, building strong teamwork, and giving students prompt feedback. In the meantime, students' attendance in online class should be required strictly so as to motivate those students who are less self-disciplined, for online learning.

Having struggled a lot with her online class, which was the first try in her over three decades of teaching, the author tries to summarize what she has learnt and pondered from her online teaching experience in the hope of doing better in her online teaching, or combining the traditional face-to-face teaching together with online teaching in the future, since the author has already felt some of the benefits of online teaching, as well as the urgency of it. As this paper is a preliminary study, based on the author's personal experience and understanding about online teaching, to some degree, it is quite subjective. In her future research, data collection and survey on students' opinions about online learning will be conducted so that the results can be more objective.

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