

【論文】

Keep Calm and Carry On: Stoicism for Teachers

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Abstract

The focus of this research is to assess the negative impact of online teaching on teachers' psychological state and subjective well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to evaluate the effectiveness of using techniques based on stoic philosophy to alleviate such effects. This research is important because understanding the negative impact of online teaching and devising effective strategies to improve teachers' subjective well-being will help them to provide more effective online classes for their students. The research approach includes a survey of 96 university instructors teaching online during the pandemic. The research also includes a journaling study into the effects of using stoic practice to improve subjective well-being while teaching online. The results suggest that during the pandemic many teachers were suffering from loneliness, stress, and anxiety due to online teaching, and that causes of these effects included reduced contact with students and colleagues, and an increased workload. The results also showed that teachers had used a range of strategies, including exercise, focusing on the positives, and reaching out to others, to help them cope. In addition, the results of this study suggest that by practicing two techniques based on stoic philosophy for as little as 20 minutes before class, teachers can reduce the negative impact of online teaching on subjective well-being. This study proposes that teacher-training workshops instructing teachers how to practice these simple techniques may benefit those forced to teach exclusively online for extended periods.

Keywords : COVID-19, On-line Teaching, Emotional Well-being, Mental Health, Stoicism

要 旨

この研究の目的は、コロナ禍のオンライン教授における教員の心理状態とウェルビーイング（主観的幸福感・主観的充実感）にもたらす悪影響を見極め、ストア哲学を元にした技術によってそれらの影響を軽減する効果を検証することにある。オンライン教授の悪影響や効果的な方

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法を探ることは、教員のウェルビーイングを高め、学生たちにより良いオンライン授業を提供するためにも重要と言える。研究アプローチとして、コロナ禍にオンライン教授を実施している大学講師96名への調査を実施した。オンライン教授の中でウェルビーイングを高めるため、ストア哲学を活用するという自己研究も含んでいる。研究結果は、コロナ禍のオンライン教授が多く教員に孤独、ストレス、不安を与え、そして学生や同僚たちとの交流機会の制限や労働時間の増加ももたらしめていることを示唆している。教員たちは積極性を高めさせるため、学生が心を通わせて協力し合えるよう様々な手段をとって工夫していた。研究結果をふまえ、授業前にストア哲学を元にした2種類の技術を取り入れて、教員の心理状態とウェルビーイングにもたらす悪影響を軽減することを提案する。それらの簡単な技術を学ぶための研修が、今後オンライン教授を余儀なくされる教員たちに利益をもたらすことになるだろう。

キーワード：コロナ禍・オンライン教授・主観的幸福感・主観的充実感・メンタルヘルス・ストア哲学

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, many universities responded to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 by making a swift change from face-to-face to online classes. Teachers had very short notice to make this change, and many faced challenges such as a lack of training in online teaching methods, and the absence of effective online learning support platforms. As the pandemic took hold, many teachers lacked the experience, technical training, and the pedagogical skills needed to integrate digital technology and instruction (Schleicher, 2020) for a successful switch to online teaching. Indeed, early studies suggest that these sudden changes increased the levels of stress experienced globally by language teachers (MacIntyre et al., 2020). The outlook at universities in Japan seems to have reflected the global situation.

For university teachers in Japan, there was similarly very little time to prepare for and adapt to online teaching before the spring semester began in 2020. During this time the author noticed increased levels of stress and negative effects on his own subjective well-being. These effects seemed to be caused by a combination of factors associated with the new teaching environment. They included a lack of interaction with colleagues and students, an increase in computer screen time, and the strain of adapting to a largely unfamiliar mode of teaching within a short time frame. At the outset of the pandemic, the author had already employed stoic philosophy in everyday life for several years, and achieved some success in reducing the frequency and intensity of negative emotional states. In response to the potentially overwhelming circumstances at the beginning of 2020, the author tailored everyday stoic principles specifically to the practice of online teaching.

The aim of this research is to improve online teaching practice in the future by reducing the negative effects of an online teaching environment on teachers' subjective well-being. The following research questions are addressed:

- RQ1 : What are the negative effects of teaching online on university teachers' subjective well-being?
- RQ2 : What characteristics of teaching online cause negative effects on university teachers' subjective well-being?
- RQ3 : What are Japanese university teachers doing to mediate the negative effects of teaching online on their subjective well-being?
- RQ4 : Can practicing stoic techniques alleviate the negative effects on subjective well-being caused by online teaching?

In order to address these questions, the study adopts an action research approach. Table 1 shows the typical stages of action research, adapted from Hitchcock & Hughes (1995). The corresponding stages of the present study along with the associated research question/s (listed above) are also included.

Table 1 : Action research stages (adapted from Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995) corresponding to the present study

Action Research Stage	The Present Study	Section	Research Question
① identify the problem	self-reflection	1	—
② reflect on the problem	self-reflection; teacher survey	1 / 2	1 / 2 / 3
③ formulate a change to address the problem	stoic practice techniques for teachers	3 / 4.1 / 4.2	4
④ implement the change	journaling study (autumn semester 2020/21)	4.3	4
⑤ assess the effectiveness of the change	journaling study (autumn semester 2020/21)	4.4	4

Research questions 1, 2 and 3 are addressed through a survey of 96 university language teachers working across Japan during the pandemic. Research question 4 is investigated through a journaling study carried out by the author in the autumn semester of 2020.

2. ONLINE TEACHING WELL-BEING SURVEY

To examine the effects of online teaching on teachers' subjective well-being during the pandemic, a retrospective online questionnaire (see Appendix A) was formulated and administered during the last week of June 2021. This chapter is divided into two subsections. The first part describes how data was collected, and the second presents a summary and discussion of the results.

2.1 Data Collection

The questionnaire was posted to an online forum specifically for English language teachers

working online in Japan during the pandemic. Subjects were asked about their experience from the onset of the pandemic until the time of the questionnaire. Ninety-six university-level teachers responded to the questionnaire, of which 56 were male and 37 female, with three teachers preferring not to state their gender. Convenience sampling produced a large data set, however the sample is subject to volunteer-bias since the teachers who agreed to complete the questionnaire may differ from those who did not.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section contained six prompts on the negative effects of online teaching on subjective well-being with teachers asked to respond using a four-point Likert scale (1 disagree~4 agree). These prompts were adapted from a study by MacIntyre et al (2020). The next section asked about the causes of these effects. First, respondents were presented with a series of 11 possible causes derived from the authors own experience during the pandemic. Respondents were again asked to agree or disagree using the same four-point scale. In an open-ended question, respondents could then list any additional sources of reduced well-being caused by teaching online. The last section of the questionnaire contained a single open-ended item asking teachers to list any strategies they had implemented to alleviate the negative effects on their well-being from teaching online, and to state how effective these coping strategies had been. The questionnaire can be viewed in full in Appendix A.

2.2 Survey Results

The results of the survey are divided into three subsections: Firstly, the effects of teaching online on subjective well-being ; next the causes of these effects; and finally the coping strategies employed by respondents to alleviate these effects.

2.2.1 *Effects*

A summary of the survey results for the negative effects on subjective well-being of online teaching can be seen in Table 2. A response of 3 or 4 on the scale (1 disagree~4 agree) was counted as agreement with the corresponding prompt. Almost half (46%) of respondents reported that teaching online had negatively affected their emotional state or mental health. For the specific prompts, 69% of teachers said that teaching online made them feel disconnected from other people, with 56% of the sample reporting that it had sometimes made them feel lonely. Increased levels of stress were reported by 52% of teachers and occasional feelings of anger were experienced by 39% of the sample. Finally, roughly a third of teachers (33%) said that they felt more anxious teaching online than face-to-face. The results clearly show that a range of negative effects from online teaching were being felt by a significant proportion of the teachers in the sample.

Table 2 : The negative effects of online teaching

Negative Effects	Agree (Likert scale 3 or 4)	
	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
Teaching online negatively affects my emotional state / mental health.	44	46%
Teaching online makes me feel disconnected from other people.	66	69%
Teaching online occasionally makes me feel lonely.	54	56%
Teaching online increases my level of stress.	50	52%
Teaching online occasionally makes me feel angry.	37	39%
I feel more anxious teaching online than teaching face-to-face.	32	33%

2.2.2 Causes

In the next part of the survey, respondents were asked to check off from a series of 11 possible factors those which they believed had negatively affected their emotional state / mental health during the pandemic. The list of factors was derived from the author's own experience during the pandemic. A summary of the results can be seen in Table 3. The most common cause of negative effects was reduced contact with students due to teaching online, with 63% of teachers agreeing that this had negatively affected them. The least cited cause was a loss of control, with only 23% of teachers agreeing that this had negatively impacted them. The results show that a variety of factors related to the online teaching environment had negatively affected respondents' subjective well-being.

Table 3 : Causes of negative effects on emotional state / mental health of teaching online-prompted items

Causes of Negative Effects	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
reduced contact with students	60	63%
increased workload	60	63%
increased preparation time	59	62%
reduced contact with colleagues	58	60%
blurred lines between work and home	53	55%
work-life balance issues	40	42%
unfamiliar technology	36	38%
future uncertainty	33	34%
isolation	33	34%
irregular hours	30	31%
loss of control	22	23%

Section two of the questionnaire also included an open-ended question where respondents could name additional causes of negative effects on their emotional state or mental health due to online teaching. Answers were grouped into categories of similar causes. Table 4 shows a summary of the

resultant categories along with the frequency of responses for each category.

Table 4 : Causes of negative effects on emotional state / mental health of teaching online-open ended item

Causes of Negative Effects	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
inadequate support from superiors	10	10%
impaired physical health and/or reduced exercise	8	8%
technology limitations	7	7%
unsatisfactory student behavior	5	5%
increased screen time	3	3%
unfair work apportionment	1	1%
relationships with colleagues	1	1%
fatigue	1	1%

The most frequent cause of negative effects on emotional state or mental health was a lack of support from superiors, expressed by ten respondents. Some teachers cited frustration that there was little understanding or empathy from superiors and administration to help them with the sudden transition to online teaching. One teacher said that the “...*admin staff have no idea of what we teachers are going through*”. Another factor which negatively affected eight respondents was impaired physical health and/or reduced physical exercise. Teaching online usually involves considerably more sitting down than face-to-face teaching and respondents mentioned sitting for extended periods, back ache, shoulder pain, headaches and an overall reduction in physical activity. Some teachers said that looking at a computer screen for long periods had resulted in impaired vision. Five teachers reported that unsatisfactory student behavior had a negative effect on them. Some said that they felt frustrated because less motivated students found it easier to avoid work in an online environment. Some respondents had difficulty persuading students to turn on their cameras, submit homework assignments, and be more active during class. From the responses to section 2 of the questionnaire it is evident that a range of causes relating to the online teaching environment was responsible for the negative effects on emotional well-being discussed in section 2.2.1.

2.2.3 Teacher Coping Strategies

The last section of the survey contained a single open-ended question asking teachers to describe any strategies they had implemented to alleviate the negative effects of online teaching on their emotional state and mental health. Responses were again categorised into related strategies. Table 5 shows a summary of these categories along with the frequency of responses for each.

Table 5 : Coping Strategies for the negative effects of teaching online

Coping Strategy	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
Exercise	31	32%
Appreciating the Positives	10	10%
Networking/Reaching Out	9	9%
Non-work-related Activities	8	8%
Separating Work and Homelife	7	7%
Adjusting Class Format	7	7%
Alcohol Use	6	6%
Empathizing with Students	6	6%
Meditation	6	6%
Limiting Computer Time	5	5%
Setting Limits	4	4%
Sleep	3	3%
Diet	2	2%

The most common coping strategy among the respondents was taking regular exercise. Thirty-one teachers out of the sample of 96 said that exercise had helped them cope with teaching online. Popular types of exercise included running, walking and hiking, cycling, and going to the gym. Some respondents emphasized that exercising outdoors in nature had been particularly beneficial. A number of teachers said that because they did not need to commute to work, they could now use that time for exercising, for example one teacher said, *“I have maximized time normally spent commuting in the morning by being physically active and going for a run etc. This has been great, the sense of achievement so early in my day has motivated me through long hours of sitting in front of a screen”*. Regular exercise was evidently an important coping strategy for many of the respondents.

Another popular coping strategy (10 responses) was trying to focus on the positives of the situation. Some teachers said their teaching practice had improved due to teaching online because they would be able to continue using the technology applications when classes returned to a face-to-face format. Others said they often reminded themselves that without online teaching technology there would be no classes and that this habit helped them be thankful rather than resentful. Another teacher said that mastering the new technology gave him a sense of achievement which helped him cope with online teaching. One teacher went so far as to formalize the process of being grateful, keeping a gratitude diary and listing three things she was thankful for each day. In addition, nine teachers said that building and maintaining support networks was an effective coping strategy. Some talked about reaching out to colleagues to discuss problems, while others said they looked for advice from online support groups and teaching forums. One teacher had been granted permission to join the online classes of her colleagues in order

to collect ideas for her own classes. Several teachers also stressed the importance of having regular phone calls or video chats with friends and family during the pandemic. Finding support from others and trying to remain positive were popular coping strategies for many of the survey respondents.

Eight teachers in the survey said that they found relief from the negative effects of online teaching through the pursuit of non-work-related activities. From golf to gardening, and from driving to drawing, it seems that many teachers in the survey could forget about work by focusing on something else for a time. In a similar vein, maintaining a clear boundary between work and home-life was mentioned by seven of the survey respondents. Some reported that they did this in a physical sense, for example going into their office each day, or leaving work at the office when they came home. For those teachers who remained at home, some drew the boundary psychologically, for example one teacher said that he wore a shirt while he was working and changed into a T-shirt when it was time to stop.

Adjusting the class format to make teaching online less stressful was a technique mentioned by seven teachers. Techniques included alternating between live and on-demand classes, taking a 10-minute break in the middle of class with students and teacher switching off their cameras, reducing the length of classes, switching off cameras during writing exercises, and encouraging as much interaction as possible using small groups (breakout rooms) during live online classes. Other techniques used to reduce the negative effects of online teaching mentioned in the survey data included alcohol use (both increased and decreased), empathizing with students, mediation, limiting computer screen time, setting limits and knowing when to stop working, getting enough sleep, and regulating diet (both healthy and comfort-food). From the survey results, it is clear that respondents actively employed a variety of strategies to help them cope with the emotional and physical demands of online teaching during the pandemic. The following sections of this paper describe a journaling study which measures the efficacy of using stoic practice to reduce the negative effects on subjective well-being of teaching online.

3. STOICISM

For those readers unfamiliar with Stoicism, Sections 3.1 to 3.3 provide a brief summary of the origins and fundamental principles of this ancient philosophy.

3.1 The Origins of Stoicism

To philosophize is to do something uniquely human. It is to ask questions about the nature of the environment and people's place in it, in an attempt to uncover the truth about the world. Philosophy has probably been around ever since *Homo Sapiens* first emerged from the savannas of East Africa around 300,000 years ago (Schlebusch et al., 2017). Although our ancestors were probably too busy hunting and gathering to devote much time to such musings, this changed around 12,000 years ago with the

advent of farming. This (First) Agricultural Revolution allowed ever larger groups of humans to live and cooperate together. Resources became more abundant for those at the top of social hierarchies with the result that a privileged few were able to devote a significant amount of time to pondering the human condition (Harari, 2015). Philosophical thinking seems to have taken a further leap forward around the 6th Century BC with the appearance of renowned thinkers like Confucius (551 BC–479 BC) in China, the Buddha (563 BC–483 BC) in India, and Heraclitus (535 BC–475 BC) in Mediterranean Europe (Russell, 2015). A century or so later in ancient Greece, a man was born who would shape philosophy for the coming millennia.

Socrates (470 BC–399 BC) lived in ancient Greece and remains one of the most celebrated figures in history. His renown stems not only from his ideas, but also from the way he lived (Russell, 2015). He spent his time considering what constituted a good life and meticulously examined his own life and applied the results of his findings to it. Socrates believed that doing the right thing was important, so much so that he was willing to die for his principles. Prior to Socrates, philosophy had been only concerned with questions about the physical world and associated phenomena, however Socrates changed the focus of philosophy to the human condition and what it means to lead a good life. Immediately following Socrates' death, many philosophical schools appeared in and around the city of Athens (ibid.). One of these schools would give rise to Stoicism.

One of the Athenian schools was founded by Zeno of Citium (334 BC–262 BC) who had come to Athens as a student and first studied at the Cynic school, and then later he learnt about Platonist philosophy from Stilpo (360 BC–280 BC) and Polemo (died 270 BC) at the Academy (Preus, 2015). Zeno then founded his own school for which he combined the lifestyle advice he had learnt from the Cynics with the theoretical philosophy from the Academy. Zeno liked to give his lectures on a particular colonnade of painted porches in Athens. The colonnade was known as the *Stoa Poikile* which meant decorated porch, and soon Zeno and his followers became known as the Stoics (ibid.). The enormous popularity of Zeno's school was largely due to its focus on how to live one's life.

3.2 Greek Stoicism: The Examined Life

Greek Stoics thought that becoming the best version of oneself would automatically confer happiness on an individual. Although Zeno was also concerned with the study of logic and physics, the most important component of his lectures was ethics. However, the modern use of the word *ethics* is subtly different from its meaning in ancient Greek (Irvine, 2009). Nowadays *ethics* typically means the moral distinction between what is right and wrong. The ancient Greek word for *ethics* was *eudaimonia* (*eu* = good ; *daimon* = spirit) and is more accurately translated as *happiness*, or *human flourishing*. The Greek Stoics believed that by being virtuous, we would achieve this state of *eudaimonia*.

Again however, there is a distinction to make between the meanings of the modern and ancient use of the word *virtue*. The modern meaning conjures ideas of abstinence, restraint and even a pleasureless existence, however the ancient definition of *virtue* (*arete* in ancient Greek) was to live in accordance with one's nature, in other words to become the best possible version of oneself (ibid.). Therefore, the Greek Stoics believed that by fulfilling one's potential he or she would thereby attain happiness. In order to achieve this state however, it was necessary to define what constitutes living well and fulfilling one's potential.

The Greek Stoics believed that by examining one's life closely an individual would discover what would constitute a good life. They recognised that the ability to be rational was a quality unique to humans and that through reason certain conclusions about what it means to live a good life would become self-evident (Irvine, 2009). For example, one can conclude that people are naturally social and therefore have certain obligations to their fellow human beings. The first step was for an individual to take stock and determine the best way to conduct him or herself in life. The next step was then to live in accordance with these conclusions and happiness would be the result (ibid.). The Greek Stoics thereby emphasised the importance of living a good life – a virtuous life in the ancient Greek sense of the word. Roman Stoicism however, had a subtle change of emphasis.

3.3 Roman Stoicism: Emotional Well-being

In the second century BC the ideas of Stoicism spread to the Roman Empire. The Stoic school of Athens had continued to flourish and in 140 BC, Panaetius (180 BC–109 BC), then leader of the school, travelled to Rome and introduced Stoic philosophy where it soon gained in popularity (Preus, 2015). In order to meet their own needs however, the Romans adapted Stoicism in two important ways. Firstly, they ignored the branches of logic and physics and concentrated wholly on ethics. Secondly, whereas the primary ethical objective of the Greek Stoics was to live virtuously, for the Roman Stoics it was the attainment of tranquility (Irvine, 2009). For them, tranquility meant a psychological state characterised by the absence of negative emotions, for example frustration or anger, and the presence of positive ones such as contentment or joy (ibid.). The techniques of the Roman Stoics were used for the present study since they align with the objective of improving teachers' psychological state of emotional well-being. The next section describes how the techniques were adapted specifically for teachers in an online teaching environment.

4. STOIC PRACTICE FOR TEACHERS

The survey data in Chapter 2 indicates that an increase in negative emotional states caused by the online teaching environment was experienced by many university teachers working in Japan during the pandemic. Using the principles of Roman Stoicism for the attainment of emotional tranquility, the author devised two techniques specifically adapted for teachers in order to alleviate anxiety and stress associated with this new working environment. The following sections describe the two strategies.

4.1 Technique ①: Teacher Negative Visualization (TNV)

By giving thought to things which could go wrong during a class, a teacher can lessen the impact if such things actually happen. Anticipating problems is an essential part of planning a lesson for all teachers because it enables them to preempt such problems. Teachers can devise and implement strategies which can prevent these occurrences from happening in the first place. However, the Roman Stoics had a less obvious reason for thinking about undesirable things happening. Seneca (4 BC–65 BC) and Epictetus (50BC–135 BC) both claimed that thinking about negative outcomes lessens their emotional impact when they actually happen (Irvine, 2009). In other words, considering all that could go wrong has the effect of improving one's resilience to disappointment when they inevitably do. No matter how much forethought a teacher gives to the prevention of things going wrong during a class, they inevitably will at some stage. This seems to be particularly true of teaching online, perhaps because there is simply more that can go wrong, or that the format is unfamiliar or worse, inherently problematic. Considering what could go wrong for an upcoming online class can help to mitigate the negative emotional effect if, or rather when, such an outcome actually occurs.

An additional advantage of considering what could go wrong in advance is that this has the effect of making one more appreciative of the things that are going well. Hedonic adaptation is a universal characteristic whereby humans naturally adapt to an improved situation and soon take it for granted. The Roman Stoics recognized that the key to satisfaction was wanting the things one already has and they devised a way of doing this. Negative Visualization (Irvine, 2009) is the practice of considering the loss of those things which we value. Doing so can prevent a person from taking them for granted. According to Irvine, for optimal benefit, negative visualization should be practiced for short periods only, but on a regular basis (*ibid.*). For the purpose of this research, negative visualization was adapted specifically for the use of teachers by the author as Teacher Negative Visualization (TNV).

Teacher Negative Visualization (TNV) consists of two stages. First, a teacher should list components of their teaching and working environment which they value. These can be subdivided under the following headings: Students, Facilities, Institution, Colleagues/Superiors, Administration, and Other. An example

list from the author's own practice can be seen in Table 6. This first stage of TNV has the effect of bringing to mind those elements of the teaching context for which the teacher feels appreciation.

Table 6 : Examples of teaching and working environment valued components-TNV Step 1

Teaching & Working Context	Valued Components
Students	<i>Some students are very keen to study. They appreciate my classes and benefit from my feedback.</i>
Facilities	<i>I have a nice office. It's great to have my own private space to plan lessons and to work.</i>
Institution	<i>The university has a positive reputation for education. Our department has a great reputation.</i>
Colleagues & Superiors	<i>It's good that I have a few colleagues who I can rely on and turn to for advice when I need to. My boss is supportive and seems to appreciate my work – I feel I can trust my boss.</i>
Administration	<i>Ms. X from the Academic Affairs office is very supportive and helps me out a lot with administrative affairs.</i>

The second step of TNV aims to help a teacher to be more appreciative of the components on the list created in step one. It involves spending around ten minutes imagining what life would be like if some or all the components on the list were suddenly taken away. The teacher should consider how the situation would degenerate in the absence of some or all of the items on their list. In the present study, the author practiced TNV for ten minutes in the hour before one class per week throughout a 14-week semester.

4.2 Technique ②: Acknowledging the Limits of Teacher-Control

The ancient stoic philosopher Epictetus pointed out that some things are under our control while other things are not. The things which are under our control are our opinions, actions, impulses, desires and aversions. Everything else, including the actions and opinions of other people, are outside our control (Higginson et al, 1944). If a person decides to want things which are not under their control and they fail to acquire them, they will experience negative emotions such as frustration or annoyance. However, Epictetus explained that if a person decides only to want the things under their control, they can avoid these negative emotions. He recommends utilizing what is under one's control, and meeting all else as it comes (Higginson et al, 1944). In other words, for things outside their control people should accept whatever happens. Moreover, by identifying the things which are under their control and those which are not, a person can focus their efforts on affecting the former and not waste time worrying about the later. In doing so, they will be more successful in affecting their desired change in the external environment. Although this technique can of course be applied by anyone and in any situation, it was adapted for the present study specifically for a teaching and lesson planning context.

A teacher can run through the procedural aspects of a lesson plan and acknowledge where they have control and where they do not. For example, during the very first stage of an online class the teacher may be planning to instruct students to switch on their cameras to facilitate communication and to enable monitoring of students' participation. For this step, the teacher has control of the request itself, but not whether students actually turn on their cameras. A teacher also has control over his opinion about some students not turning on their cameras. He can decide to accept this rather than becoming frustrated. By working through a lesson plan in this way, a teacher can identify the parts they can control and concentrate their efforts on them. They can ignore the parts which are not under their control. An illustration of this process from the author's own practice can be viewed in Table 7. Using homework as an example, the choice, preparation, and instructions for a homework assignment are within the teacher's control. The teacher can make the assignment as clear and achievable as possible for students. However, the teacher cannot ultimately control whether students do the homework assignment or not. The explicit recognition of this fact can help a teacher avoid feelings of frustration and annoyance when some students inevitably, despite the best efforts of the teacher, do not submit their homework assignment.

Table 7 : Example of acknowledging the limits of teacher-control

Procedural Element	Control	No Control
Web Cameras On	<i>Ask students to turn on their cameras. Explain to students why it's important.</i>	<i>Some students may not turn on their cameras.</i>
Homework	<i>Explain the homework clearly—show the LMS. Ensure instructions are clear on the LMS (in both English and Japanese). Check if students understand.</i>	<i>Some students may not do the homework assignment.</i>
Video Conferencing Software	<i>Make sure I boot up my computer at least 30 minutes before class. Ensure any updates are installed.</i>	<i>There might be a problem with ZOOM / internet connection.</i>

The author practiced Technique ② (Acknowledging the Limits of Teacher–Control) in this way for ten minutes in the hour before one class per week for a 14–week semester. The following section explains the quasi–experimental design to measure the effectiveness of the two stoic practices outlined above.

4.3 Experimental Design

To measure the effectiveness of the two techniques outlined in section 4 the author conducted a journaling study during the autumn semester of 2020. This section explains the experimental procedure for this process.

The effects of the two stoic techniques were measured for two live 90–minute online classes taught

by the author using conferencing software (Zoom) during the 14-week autumn semester from September 2020 to the end of January 2021. The first class, *Language and Communication Theory*, met on a Tuesday from 11:00 to 12:40 with 38 students. The second class was *English Debate* and met on a Friday from 15:20 to 17:00 with only five students. The two techniques (Negative Visualization ① and Acknowledging the Limits of Teacher-control ②) were practiced by the author for 10 minutes per technique in the hour prior to one of these classes each week. In order to remove the unwanted effects of other variables such as class size, class content and student characteristics, the class prior to which this practice took place alternated each week. For example, in Week 1 the author practiced the two techniques before *Language and Communication Theory*, and not before *English Debate*, but in week 2 this was reversed (see Tables 8 and 9). In this way, it was hoped that any differences in results between those classes for which the two techniques were practiced, and for those classes for which they were not, would be attributable to the techniques themselves rather than other factors.

Table 8: Experimental schedule for (odd) weeks 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13

Time	Tuesday	Friday
9 : 10 ~ 10 : 50	Technique ① (TNV) × 10 minutes Technique ② (Limits of Control) × 10 minutes	
11 : 00 ~ 12 : 40	Online Class: <i>Language and Communication Theory</i>	
12 : 40 ~ 13 : 30	Journal Writing	
13 : 30 ~ 15 : 20		No Practice
15 : 20 ~ 17 : 00		Online Class: <i>English Debate</i>
17 : 00 ~		Journal Writing

Table 9: Experimental schedule for (even) weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 14

Time	Tuesday	Friday
9 : 10 ~ 10 : 50	No Practice	
11 : 00 ~ 12 : 40	CLASS 1: <i>Language and Communication Theory</i>	
12 : 40 ~ 13 : 30	Journal Writing	
13 : 30 ~ 15 : 20		Technique ① (TNV) × 10 minutes Technique ② (Limits of Control) × 10 minutes
15 : 20 ~ 17 : 00		CLASS 2: <i>English Debate</i>
17 : 00 ~		Journal Writing

After both classes the author made a detailed journal entry which included general field notes on how the class went, any specific problems, and a *during-class subjective well-being rating* from 0 (stressed/unhappy) to 10 (calm/happy). For the classes where the two stoic practices were used, journal entries also included notes on any perceived benefits from using the techniques. The journaling format can be viewed in full in Appendix B. The results of the experiment are presented and discussed in the following sections.

4.4 Findings & Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the action research study described in section 4.3. Journaling was used to measure the effects of the two stoic practice techniques described in sections 4.1 and 4.2. First the in-class well-being scores are presented along with a discussion of the trends seen in the data. This is followed by a summary of journal entries on the perceived effects of the two stoic techniques. The perceived effects of using Teacher Negative Visualization (Technique ①) are dealt with first, followed by the perceived effects of Acknowledging the Limits of Teacher-control (Technique ②). The discussion includes journal excerpts in support of the conclusions drawn.

4.4.1 In-class Well-being

After each class, the author recorded a *during-class well-being rating* on a range from 0 (stressed/unhappy) to 10 (calm/happy). Figure 1 shows plots for these scores for classes when the stoic techniques were practiced (blue), and for when they were not (red). Both plots show a steady improvement in well-being as the semester progressed. This may be due to the ongoing familiarization with the online teaching environment. For example, after *Language and Communication Theory* class #3, the author wrote, “*Feels like I’m really getting used to teaching online. It was quite nerve-racking going back to it after the summer break, especially using Zoom. But it all came back, and I can navigate my way around the software without having to concentrate too much – so I can focus on actually teaching*”. The steady improvement in scores may also be due to the author becoming more familiar with the students themselves. For example, in Week #1 after *English Debate* the author wrote, “*It’s always the same, still get nervous with a new class. Hoping we get along and that there are no difficult / troublesome students*”.

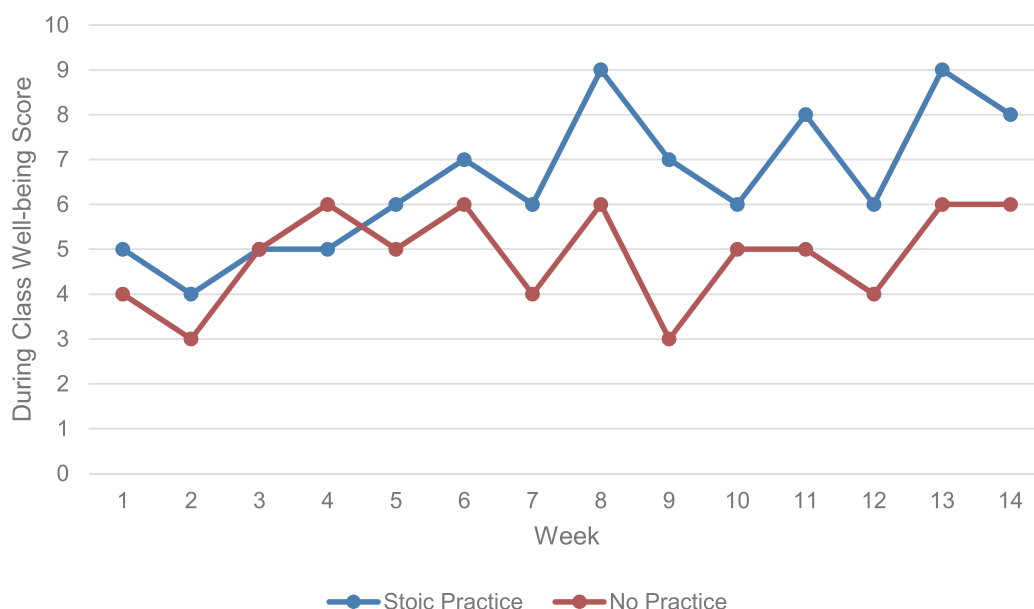


Figure 1 : During Class Teacher Well-being with and without Pre-class Stoic Practice

In addition to the steady improvement of well-being scores for both the stoic practice and no stoic practice classes, excluding only weeks 3 and 4 the classes for which the stoic techniques were used had consistently higher in-class well-being scores. Moreover, the margin between the two sets of scores appears to increase as the semester progressed. This suggests that using the two techniques had the intended effect of reducing the negative impact on well-being during online classes. The next sections examine these positive effects in more detail using the journaling data.

4.4.2 *Influence of Stoic Practice*

After classes preceded by the stoic techniques, detailed notes were made on the perceived benefits of these practices. On all 14 occasions, the techniques were perceived by the author to have helped reduce the negative impact on emotional state. Both techniques were particularly effective at lessening the impact of problems during class. For example, after *Language and Communication Theory* class #7 the author noted that:

“...just focusing for a few minutes on what might go wrong, and the limits of my control really helped with a potentially very stressful event today. Literally five minutes before class Zoom just froze. I had to shut down my computer and restart everything. I stayed really calm and got on with the job of rebooting. The students all rejoined and we actually lost only a few minutes of class time.”

The above extract suggests that both considering what might go wrong and recognizing the limits

of control had the effect of lessening the impact of a potentially stressful event.

Teacher Negative Visualization (Technique ①) also seemed to be effective in its aim of increasing appreciation of the teaching and working environment, as illustrated by the two journal excerpts in Table 10.

Table 10 : Selection of Journal Notes Relating to Teacher Negative Visualization (Technique ①)

Week	Class	Journal Notes
#8	English Debate	<i>... I practiced thinking about those parts of the teaching environment for which I was grateful. I thought about how hard the students tried to speak only English during the 10-minute debate stage in recent classes. I also looked around at my neat, organized and well-equipped office and tried to imagine what it would be like to have to teach in the livingroom at home. When the class started, I felt more appreciative and relaxed. I think this was due at least in part to the 10 minutes spent doing TNV.</i>
#11	Language and Communication Theory	<i>The TNV seemed to be really effective today. I tried something a little different: I focused on my students' attitudes. It's a large group, but in general most of the students are really trying during class and with the homework. For the TNV I imagined what it would be like if ALL the students were unmotivated and lazy. I'm sure that this had the effect of making me more appreciative of the effort many students are making and it helped me not dwell on the few students who aren't trying.</i>

In the first example from *Debate Class #8*, the author used TNV to imagine having to teach at home. This had the effect of appreciating working from an office. Indeed, several journal entries during the semester indicated that imagining how one's teaching context could be worse has the effect of fostering an appreciation of the positives, and for increasing one's resilience when things go wrong. In the second example from *Debate Class #11*, imagining if the class was composed entirely of problematic students had the effect of making the author more appreciate of those students who were making an effort. The journal entries in Table 10 are just two instances from many of the positive influence of technique ①. The data indicates that imagining the teaching situation being worse than it currently is has the effect of making a teacher more appreciative of the positives and less prone to stress when things do not go as planned.

Acknowledging the Limits of Control (Technique ②) was effective in reducing concern about things not under the teacher's control, and increasing the focus on things under the teacher's control. This is illustrated by the two journal excerpts in Table 11.

Table 11 : Selection of Journal Notes Relating to Acknowledging the Limits of Control (Technique ②)

Week	Class	Journal Notes
#9	Language and Communication Theory	<i>Before class I spent ten minutes going through the aims for my class. I tried to focus on making the aims within my control. For example, I wanted the students to actively participate in the small group discussions and to only speak English, but I can't control if they do or not. So I reformulated the aim to 'encourage students as much as I can to participate and speak only English'. This helped me relax during class, at least I felt a slightly lower level of frustration when some students didn't follow the instructions.</i>
#13	Language and Communication Theory	<i>I was so relaxed in class today and I'm sure it's connected to the letting go of everything that I don't have control over. There were a few times when I might have normally felt frustrated or even a bit angry, but I just let it go. I'm sure this technique is working and that it becomes more effective with more practice.</i>

In the first example from *Language and Communication Theory* Class#9, the author focused attention on encouragement rather than outcome and as a result felt a lower level of frustration than usual when some students did not participate actively or they used Japanese. In the second example from Class#13, letting go of the things outside control seemed to help the author be more relaxed during class. The journal excerpts in Table 11 are two examples from numerous instances when the author perceived the beneficial effects of technique ②. The results suggest that thinking about what one actually has control over during a class can lead to lower levels of frustration and stress.

5. CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the negative influence of remote teaching on teachers' emotional well-being, and to measure the efficacy of stoic practices to alleviate them. The research questions were as follows:

- RQ1 : What are the negative effects of teaching online on university teachers' subjective well-being?
- RQ2 : What characteristics of teaching online cause negative effects on university teachers' subjective well-being?
- RQ3 : What are Japanese university teachers doing to mediate the negative effects of teaching online on their subjective well-being?
- RQ4 : Can practicing stoic techniques alleviate the negative effects on subjective well-being caused by online teaching?

This section addresses each of the questions above, summarizing the findings of this study and offering conclusions based on the findings. The limitations of this research are also acknowledged. This

is followed by recommendations based on the results along with suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary of Findings & Conclusions

The teacher survey results show that many teachers in the sample were suffering from negative emotional effects such as loneliness, stress, anxiety and anger due to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the data indicates that causes related to online teaching such as reduced contact with students and colleagues, and an increased workload, were responsible for these negative effects. It is also clear from the survey results that teachers had used a range of strategies, including exercise, focusing on the positives, and reaching out to others, to help them cope with the emotional and psychological strain of online teaching during the pandemic. The results of the journaling study suggest that practicing techniques adapted from stoic philosophy reduced the negative impact of online teaching on the author's psychological state and emotional well-being. It can be tentatively concluded that these techniques could also help other teachers reduce the negative impact of online teaching on their mental health. Moreover, given the inherently stressful nature of teaching, these techniques may also be of benefit for regular face-to-face teaching.

5.2 Limitations

The survey component of this study has a number of limitations. Firstly, the sample of teachers is not representative since convenience sampling was used. Only those who volunteered to participate are included in the sample and so the views expressed by respondents may be biased in some important way. In addition, the sample consisted exclusively of university teachers working in Japan, whereas a more diverse range of teaching contexts would have made the findings more generalizable. Finally, the survey was formulated under the assumption that the effects of online teaching were negative, however several teachers pointed out that they had experienced positive benefits due to online teaching. Despite these limitations, the results provide useful insight into the negative effects of online teaching during the pandemic and it seems reasonable to assume that these findings may apply generally and across a range of countries and institutions.

The stoic practice component of this study also contains a number of limitations. Firstly, it is possible that the author held a pre-existing bias towards the beneficial effects of stoic practice and that this was reflected in the results. Also, the study consisted of only one participant and therefore the results ultimately only apply to the author and the author's teaching environment. In other words, the results cannot be reliably generalized to other teachers and their individual contexts. Despite these limitations, the results of this exploratory study represent encouraging evidence for the effectiveness of stoic practice to mitigate the negative effects on emotional well-being of online teaching. As such, further and more rigorous investigation in this area appears to be justified.

5.3 Recommendations

The negative effects of online teaching on emotional well-being due to the switch to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic was felt by many of the teachers who participated in this exploratory study. The data revealed a variety of factors associated with online teaching responsible for these effects and that teachers had tried to implement strategies to offset their impact. The results suggest that teachers can reduce the negative impact of online teaching on their mental health by practicing Teacher Negative Visualization (TNV) and Teacher-Control Limit Recognition. This study proposes that teacher-training workshops instructing teachers how to practice these techniques may be of benefit to help reduce the negative effects of online teaching and thereby ensure more effective online classes for students. In addition, further research in this area is needed to build on the initial findings of this study. Experimental research involving a larger sample of teachers who undergo formalized training in the stoic techniques would yield more reliable and conclusive data about the benefits of using Stoicism for teachers. In addition, as the pandemic recedes and face-to-face classes resume, it would also be helpful to measure the impact of these techniques in a face-to-face teaching environment.

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Appendix A - Teacher Well-being Questionnaire

Hello!

I'm researching the effects of teaching online on teacher well-being during the pandemic. Has the online teaching environment negatively impacted your emotional state? Can you identify any specific causes? Have you discovered any effective steps to help alleviate these effects?

It won't take long to complete this questionnaire - most of the questions are multiple choice.

Thank you very much for your help.

Bob Ashcroft

Background Information

Your Name (leave blank if you wish to remain anonymous): _____

Gender:

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say

At what type of institution do you teach most of your classes?

- ☐ Conversation School
- ☐ Junior High / High School
- ☐ University

① Well-being

disagree ◆ ——— ◆ ——— ◆ ——— ◆ *agree*
1 2 3 4

- Teaching online negatively affects my emotional state / mental health.
- Teaching online makes me feel disconnected from other people.
- Teaching online increases my level of stress.
- I feel more anxious teaching online than teaching face-to-face.
- Teaching online occasionally makes me feel angry.
- Teaching online occasionally makes me feel lonely.

② Causes

From the list below, please check all those factors which have negatively affected your emotional state / mental health during the pandemic.

- ☐ reduced contact with students
- ☐ reduced contact with colleagues
- ☐ unfamiliar technology
- ☐ work-life balance issues
- ☐ increased preparation time
- ☐ increased workload
- ☐ future uncertainty
- ☐ loss of control
- ☐ blurred lines between work and home
- ☐ isolation
- ☐ irregular hours

Are there any other factors, not included in the list above, which have negatively affected your emotional state / mental health? What are they?

③ Coping Strategies

What strategies have you implemented in order to alleviate the negative effects on your emotional state / mental health of teaching online? Have they worked?

Appendix B – Journaling Format

WEEK 1					
<i>English through Songs</i>		Stoic Practice?	<i>English Debate</i>		Stoic Practice?
		YES			NO
Satisfaction			Satisfaction		
In Class Well-being			In Class Well-being		
① How did the class go?			① How did the class go?		
② Any specific problems?			② Any specific problems?		
③ How did the Stoic Techniques help?					