# L2 learning in half the time? A comparative study of modality and session length in first-semester Japanese and Spanish

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## Abstract

This study explores the impact of instructional modality and session length on student success and retention in first-semester Japanese and Spanish language courses at a large urban community college. The research analyzed pre- and post-tests, final grades, and retention rates across multiple academic terms, including standard 16-week and compressed 8-week sessions during the fall and spring semesters, as well as intensive 10-week and 5-week terms offered in the summer. Courses were delivered in asynchronous, synchronous, hybrid, hyflex, and face-to-face formats. Instructor perspectives, gathered through interviews, recorded conversations, and email correspondence, provided anecdotal insights into instructional practices and student engagement. Drawing on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Long's Interaction Hypothesis, the findings reveal that Japanese I students performed best in 16-week sessions—particularly in asynchronous formats—where extended input and longer exposure supported gains in post-test scores and retention. Spanish I students showed stronger performance during the first half of compressed terms, especially in hybrid and synchronous formats. In contrast, outcomes were consistently lower in the second-session short terms. Across both languages, courses featuring real-time instructor interaction resulted in higher success rates than asynchronous formats. These findings suggest that effective language instruction depends not only on session duration, but also on how well instructional design aligns with learners' developmental needs, the structure of the academic calendar, and the inherent complexity of the target language.

*Keywords:* second language acquisition, instructional modality, session length, student retention, compressed courses.

## Introduction

In response to declining enrollments and reduced tuition revenue, many colleges across the United States have implemented Guided Pathways reforms, including the adoption of 8-week session lengths. These compressed course formats are often part of broader institutional strategies to improve student outcomes and secure performance-based funding. For example, since 2015, Ohio has allocated 100% of its higher education funding based on student success metrics, such as course completion, credential attainment, and measurable progress toward a degree. Similarly, several Texas community colleges have transitioned to 8-week models to support timely degree progression and workforce readiness. Amarillo College reported an increase in course success rates from 74.2% to 80.9% after implementing 8-week sessions (Wyatt, 2016), while Odessa College experienced gains in enrollment, persistence, and academic momentum following a large-scale conversion to compressed formats (Sloan, 2017). Tarrant County College also launched online 8-week courses in 2017 to facilitate more flexible pathways to completion.

Urban Community College (pseudonym), a large multi-campus institution in central Texas, has offered asynchronous 8-week courses since 1998. In fall 2023, Urban Community College

(UCC) expanded this model by piloting on-campus 8-week sessions at its Brazos (pseudonym) campus, one of 11 district locations. UCC's mission emphasizes equitable access to higher education through traditional and distance learning, career training, and applied baccalaureate degrees. During the Fall 2023 term, UCC enrolled 35,600 credit-seeking students—8,698 full-time and 26,902 part-time. Students typically take 4.1 years to complete an Associate Degree or transfer to a four-year institution. Notably, UCC's four-year graduation rate for fall 2016 transfer students (71%) surpassed the Texas state average for community colleges (64%).

## Statement of the Problem

While research on compressed sessions has grown in fields such as STEM, aviation, instructional leadership, and allied health, limited attention has been paid to second language acquisition (SLA) in these formats, particularly at the community college level. This gap is especially pressing as UCC expands its 8-week pilot to include face-to-face language instruction. As of Fall 2023, Japanese and Spanish were the only world languages offered face-to-face at the Brazos campus. These two languages differ significantly in structure, difficulty, and the time required for proficiency. According to the U.S. Department of State, Spanish—a Category I language—requires approximately 30 weeks of instruction to reach "General Professional Proficiency" (Speaking-3/Reading-3) on the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale. In contrast, Japanese, a Category IV language, requires approximately 88 weeks to achieve the same level of proficiency (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

To address the paucity of research on language learning in compressed formats, this study investigates student success and retention in first-semester Japanese and Spanish courses offered in varying modalities and session lengths. Specifically, this study examines language acquisition gains between pre- and post-tests, course grades, withdrawal rates, and both student and faculty perceptions. Instructor perspectives, gathered through informal interviews, recorded conversations, and email correspondence, provided anecdotal insights that will be formally analyzed in future research. Findings from this current study will offer valuable insights for community colleges, universities, and language programs aiming to design student-centered curricula that align with learners' needs, institutional goals, and language acquisition principles.

## Definition of Key Terms

In this study, "success" is defined as students earning a final course grade of A, B, or C in first-semester Japanese or Spanish. It also includes measurable language acquisition gains, as indicated by pre- and post-test results. "Retention" refers to a student's continued enrollment through the end of the course, measured by withdrawal rates.

### Instructional Modalities

**Face-to-face (F2F):** Traditional in-person classroom instruction conducted on a college campus.
**Asynchronous online (Async):** Fully online instruction without real-time meetings; students complete coursework independently on their own schedules.
**Synchronous online (Sync):** Fully online instruction that includes real-time, scheduled sessions using web conferencing platforms.
**Hybrid:** A combination of F2F and online components, which may include either synchronous or asynchronous instruction.

**HyFlex (FLX)**: Instruction is offered on-campus; students have the flexibility to attend face-to-face or virtually on any given class day.

### Session and Term Lengths

#### *Fall and Spring Session Lengths*

**8-week (8W):** Compressed courses that meet over eight weeks, typically covering the same content as a traditional semester in half the time.

- **First 8-week session (8W1):** The first half of the traditional 16-week semester.
- **Second 8-week session (8W2):** The second half of the traditional 16-week semester.

**16-week (16W):** Standard-length courses offered over a traditional semester in the fall or spring.

#### *Summer Session Lengths*

**10-week (10W):** Compressed summer courses spanning ten weeks.

**5-week (5W):** Highly compressed summer courses delivered over five weeks.

- **First 5-week summer session (5W1):** The first half of the 10-week summer term.
- **Second 5-week summer session (5W2):** The second half of the 10-week summer term.

These definitions and acronyms guide the analysis and interpretation of data, ensuring consistent application of terms across the research questions, literature review, and findings.

## Review of the Literature

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Compressed Courses

This review examines the advantages and disadvantages of 8-week courses compared to traditional 16-week session lengths across face-to-face and distance learning modalities. A growing number of institutions have adopted 8-week programs in response to reported gains in student success and retention, especially among non-traditional students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1997), approximately 73% of higher education students are classified as non-traditional—often over the age of 24, balancing work and family responsibilities, facing financial barriers, and demonstrating lower completion rates than their peers.

Support for compressed course formats is found in student preference data. Rodrigue et al. (2016), studying the Nicholls Online program, reported that 90% of students favored 8-week sessions over traditional term lengths. Research by Miller and Bliss (2023) further supports these preferences, revealing lower rates of missed assignments in 8-week courses (3%) compared to 16-week courses (6%). Students enrolled in shorter sessions noted improved time management, reduced opportunities to procrastinate, and increased focus, suggesting that compressed formats may foster a more structured and engaged learning experience.

Additionally, compressed sessions may facilitate increased interaction among students and between students and instructors. Grady (2013), Kops (2014), and Sheldon and Durdella (2010) each highlighted the potential for intensified communication in condensed terms. Sloan (2017) found that frequent, regular meetings fostered stronger interpersonal connections, while Kops (2014) noted that heightened engagement reduced the need for content review and repetition. However, Kops also warned that novice instructors may struggle with the demands of compressed instruction, particularly in summer terms, and recommended prioritizing experienced faculty in the staffing of compressed courses.

Despite these positive outcomes, researchers have also identified drawbacks. Holzweiss et al. (2019), examining fully online graduate education programs, found that while students performed well academically in compressed courses, they often neglected best practices such as reading assigned texts thoroughly or drafting multiple versions of written assignments. Students and instructors alike reported experiencing time pressure, which compromised feedback quality and increased stress. These pressures sometimes led to lower instructor evaluations along with student perceptions of reduced instructional presence.

Moreover, some scholars argue that longer session lengths may better support relationship-building and learning engagement. Demmans et al. (2017) reported that students in 16-week courses were more likely to develop a sense of community, revisit course materials, and engage in deeper reflection. In contrast, students in compressed courses were more likely to send frequent and urgent messages to instructors, suggesting increased anxiety or uncertainty. These findings align with Moore's (1997) theory of transactional distance, which describes the psychological and communicative space between students and instructors in distance education. Moore emphasized the importance of well-designed communication strategies and structured instruction to reduce misunderstanding and promote learner autonomy.

## Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon a sociocognitive framework grounded in the works of Vygotsky (1978), Krashen (1982), and Long (1985), emphasizing the interplay between input, interaction, and learner readiness in second language development. Central to this framework is the notion that optimal learning occurs when instruction is attuned to the learner's developmental stage and delivered within socially mediated contexts that promote engagement and comprehension.

Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) offers a foundational lens for understanding how learners benefit most from instruction slightly beyond their current level of independent performance, yet achievable with appropriate guidance. In the context of second language acquisition, this underscores the importance of scaffolded instruction within interactive environments. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, particularly the "i + 1" principle, complements this view by emphasizing that language acquisition depends on comprehensible input slightly beyond the learner's current level, reinforcing the need for rich, level-appropriate content across varied formats and session lengths. Building on both perspectives, Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis highlights the role of negotiated interaction in enhancing input comprehensibility and prompting learner output. Collectively, these theories suggest that instructional effectiveness is not determined by duration alone. Instead, it depends on how well the format aligns with learners' developmental readiness and provides meaningful, scaffolded opportunities for interaction and input within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

These theoretical perspectives frame the study's investigation into how modality and session length affect student success and retention in beginning language courses. By considering the roles of input quality, interaction, and scaffolding in various instructional environments, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What does success and retention look like for students of Japanese and Spanish language in 8-week courses?
2. How do the session length and modality of first-semester language courses impact retention of language students?

# Methodology

## Research Design

This study employed a primarily quantitative research design to examine the effects of instructional modality and session length on student success and retention in first-semester Japanese and Spanish courses at a community college. The primary data collection methods were pre- and post-tests, as well as final course grades. These quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential methods, such as t-tests and ANOVA, to identify statistically significant differences by modality and session length.

Supplementary anecdotal insights were gathered through student surveys, faculty interviews, and focus groups, offering additional context and understanding of student experiences. These qualitative data were collected during the 2023-2024 academic year and will be coded and systematically analyzed in future phases of the study. While not yet formally coded, the initial insights from these interviews and surveys will inform the interpretation of the quantitative data and provide a more comprehensive view of student outcomes. This combination of quantitative data and anecdotal insights aims to offer a richer understanding of the impact of session length and instructional modality on language acquisition and retention.

## Setting

The study was conducted at a multi-campus community college in Texas during the 2023–2024 academic year. Data were collected from sections of first-semester Japanese and Spanish courses offered during the fall, spring, and summer terms. Courses varied by instructional modality (face-to-face, asynchronous, synchronous, hybrid, HyFlex) and session length (16W, 8W1, 8W2, 10W, 5W1, 5W2).

The methodology involved administering IRB-approved background surveys (Appendix A) and pre- and post-tests to first-semester students of Japanese (Appendix B and Appendix C) and Spanish (Appendix D) during the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 terms. Additional data were also collected for Spanish in the summer of 2024. Other data collection instruments included IRB-approved semi-guided interview protocols for faculty (Appendix E) and student focus groups (Appendix F), and end-of-course surveys, along with one-on-one interviews conducted in the fall of 2023. All focus groups and interviews were held via Zoom and recorded. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the administration of surveys or interviews. A variety of modalities and session lengths were included in the study. In Japanese, 55 students responded to the background survey in Fall 2023, and the same number in Spring 2024. In Spanish, 147 students responded to the background survey in Fall 2023, 153 in Spring 2024, and 128 in Summer 2024. In sum, there were a total of 110 Japanese I and 428 Spanish I participants.

Mixed purposeful sampling was used in this study, incorporating two strategies: (1) criterion sampling and (2) typical case sampling. Criterion sampling was employed in order to select cases that met a pre-established criterion for inclusion in the study (Patton, 1990). This approach is particularly useful for examining educational programs. Recruitment criteria for faculty included: (a) teaching first-semester Japanese or Spanish, (b) willingness to participate in data collection during the 2023–2024 academic year, and (c) signing the IRB-approved faculty consent forms. Additional criteria included the two full-time faculty members assigned to teach Japanese and Spanish at the Brazos 8-week pilot campus. Both instructors also taught the same courses in the 16-week format across varying modalities. All instructors across both language

programs used the same curriculum and had to meet the same Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), thereby reducing variability. Typical case sampling was also used, as the sample was illustrative rather than definitive. This approach was well-suited to describe the program and its participants for those unfamiliar with it.

The two key faculty participants were both full-time Japanese and Spanish professors assigned to the Brazos campus prior to the 8-week pilot. To protect the privacy of all participants, identifiable information was removed from the study. Sakura (pseudonym) taught a first 8-week (8W1) section of Japanese I and a second 8-week (8W2) section of Japanese II in Fall 2023. Elena (pseudonym) taught a hybrid 8W1 section of Spanish I in both Fall 2023 and Spring 2024. Sakura also taught a 16-week synchronous course in Fall 2023, meeting virtually twice a week for 220 minutes. Elena taught a 16-week face-to-face section that met for 220 minutes in both fall and spring. Additionally, Elena taught a 16-week asynchronous section in both fall and spring semesters. Faculty provided the survey links to their first-semester students, with a submission deadline a few days into each term.

All Japanese I students from the four first-semester sections in Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 were invited to participate. Three of the four sections were included in the data collection during the fall and spring terms. Post-test scores, final averages, and surveys were collected from 57 enrolled students in Fall 2023 and 65 enrolled students in Spring 2024. Two Fall 2023 sections were 16-week synchronous courses, and one was the 8W1 hybrid pilot course at the Brazos campus. Synchronous classes met for the full required contact time of almost four hours per week. The 8W1 hybrid course included both on-campus meetings and asynchronous assignments, with students meeting on campus twice a week for a total of four hours per week. In the first year of the pilot, 8W1 sections met for half the contact time compared to 16W courses. In Spring 2024, three sections of Japanese I were included: one 16-week asynchronous course, one synchronous section meeting once a week, and one 8W1 hybrid pilot section at the Brazos campus. Both the 16W and 8W1 hybrid sections met for the same contact time.

There were 41 Spanish I sections scheduled in Fall 2023, with the high school early college sections being excluded, reducing the count to 29 sections. Of these, 14 were included in data collection. In Spring 2024, 11 of 26 sections were included. For Summer 2024, six sections were included: two 10-week (10W), two 5-week (5W1 and 5W2), and two asynchronous sections. In fall 2023, four 16-week sections were included, with one face-to-face, two HyFlex, and one asynchronous. Three 8W1 sections were included, one hybrid and two asynchronous. In Spring 2024, the study included eight 16-week sections (four face-to-face, one synchronous, and three asynchronous), two 8W1 sections (one hybrid and one asynchronous), and one 8W2 asynchronous section. In Summer 2024, the study sample included six sections across different session lengths and modalities.

## Results

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to compare student outcomes in Japanese I across session lengths and instructional modalities. Independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between 8W1 and 16W sessions for post-test scores, final grades, retention, or the percentage of students earning a grade of C or higher (all p-values > .05). Although students in the 16W sections demonstrated slightly higher average post-test scores and retention, the differences were not statistically significant (see Table 1).

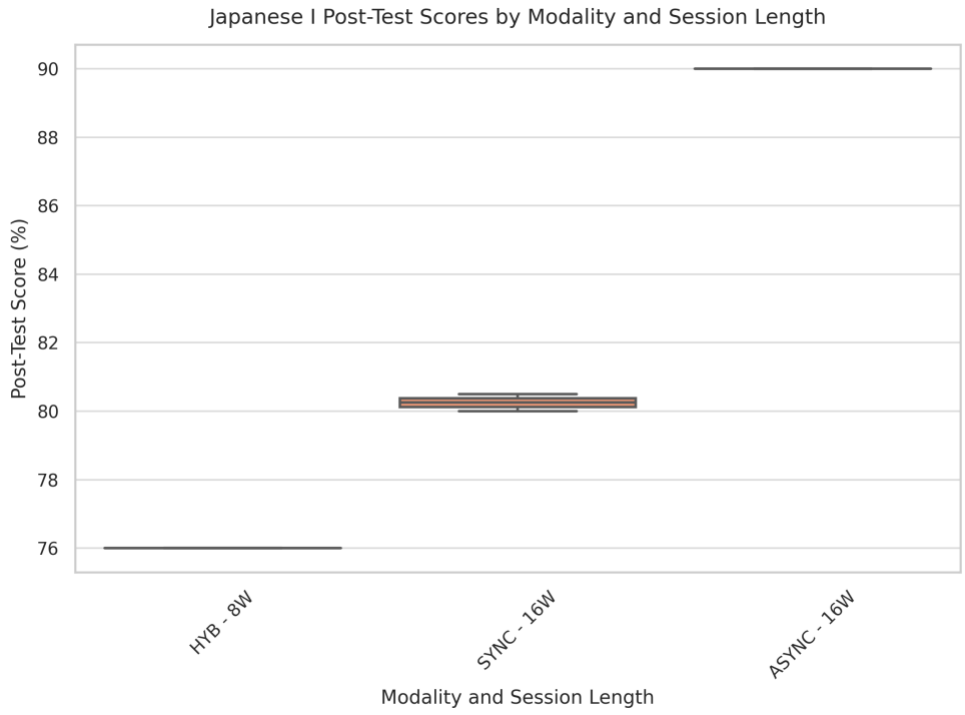
**Table 1**
*Japanese I Summary Statistics by Modality and Session Length*

| Modality/Session | Post-Test | C or Higher | Final Grade | Retention |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Async - 16W | 90.0 | 86.0 | 86.0 | 88.0 |
| Hybrid - 8W1 | 76.0 | 82.5 | 83.5 | 74.5 |
| Sync - 16W | 80.25 | 86.0 | 79.5 | 67.25 |

Note. Means are presented as percentages. Async = Asynchronous; Sync = Synchronous.

When disaggregated by modality, asynchronous 16W sections showed the highest mean post-test scores (M = 90%) and retention (M = 88%), while hybrid 8W1 sections consistently showed lower average outcomes. A t-test comparing Hybrid–8W and synchronous-16W revealed a statistically significant difference in post-test scores, t(1) = -17.00, p = .037, favoring synchronous-16W sections. No significant differences were observed between these two modality-session combinations for final grades, retention, or pass rates (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**
*Japanese I Post-Test Scores by Modality and Session Length*




This boxplot displays median, quartiles, and outliers for Japanese I post-test scores by instructional format and session length.

In Spanish I, t-tests comparing shorter session lengths (8W1, 8W2, 5W1, 5W2, 10W) with 16W courses revealed several significant differences. Students enrolled in 8W1 and 5W1 sections outperformed their 16W peers on post-tests, t(1) = 4.38, p = .004 and t(1) = 6.66, p = .001, respectively. These two groups also demonstrated significantly higher pass rates and final grades. The 5W1 group showed the highest retention (M = 100%) and the only statistically significant improvement in that outcome (t(1) = 3.21, p = .028). Full results are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**
*Spanish I Summary Statistics by Modality and Session Length*

| Modality/Session | Post-Test | C or Higher | Final Grade | Retention |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Async- 10W | 91.0 | 92.0 | 84.0 | 87.5 |
| Async - 16W | 83.75 | 73.5 | 73.75 | 74.75 |
| Async - 5W1 | 93.0 | 100.0 | 94.0 | 93.0 |
| Async - 5W2 | 81.0 | 89.0 | 81.0 | 79.0 |
| Async - 8W1 | 90.0 | 100.0 | 84.0 | 81.0 |
| Async - 8W2 | 87.0 | 74.0 | 69.5 | 62.5 |
| F2F - 16W | 85.5 | 84.5 | 84.5 | 77.0 |
| FLX - 16W | 90.0 | 91.0 | 86.5 | 85.0 |
| Hybrid - 8W1 | 96.0 | 89.0 | 83.0 | 81.5 |
| Sync - 16W | 85.0 | 74.0 | 75.0 | 82.0 |
| Sync- 5W1 | 93.0 | 96.0 | 93.0 | 100.0 |
| Sync - 8W1 | 93.0 | 93.0 | 83.0 | 89.0 |

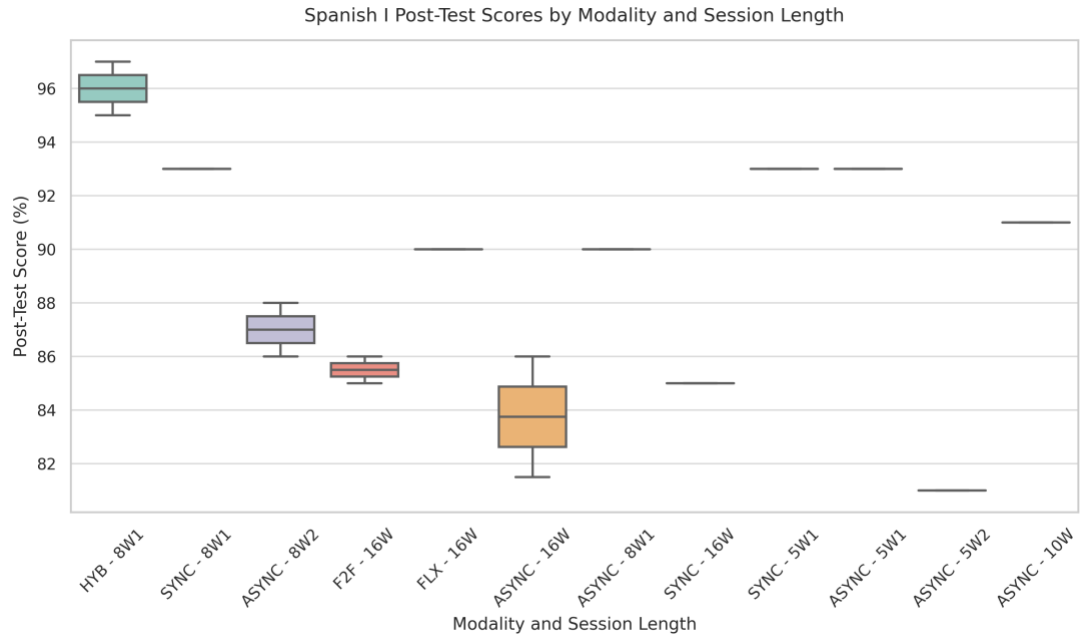
Note. Means are presented as percentages. F2F = Face-to-Face; Sync = Synchronous; Async = Asynchronous; FLX = HyFlex.

Across instructional modalities, hybrid and synchronous students had the highest average post-test scores (96% and 90.33%, respectively), while asynchronous students had the lowest final grades and retention. Statistically significant differences were found between hybrid and asynchronous (post-test), $t(1) = 4.90$, $p = .002$, and between hybrid and face-to-face (post-test), $t(1) = 9.39$, $p = .027$. No other differences reached statistical significance.

Further analysis by modality-session combinations revealed that hybrid–8W1 students significantly outperformed those in asynchronous–8W2 ($t(1) = 6.36$, $p = .024$) and face-to-face–16W ($t(1) = 9.39$, $p = .027$) on post-tests (see Figure 2). Table 3 provides a summary of all statistically significant comparisons.

**Figure 2**

*Spanish I Post-Test Scores by Modality and Session Length*




This figure shows distribution patterns for post-test performance in Spanish I across modality and session length combinations.

**Table 3**

*Significant T-Test Comparisons*

| Comparison | t-statistic | p-value |
|---|---|---|
| HYB - 8W1 vs ASYNC - 8W2 (Post-Test) | 6.36 | 0.024 |
| HYB - 8W1 vs F2F - 16W (Post-Test) | 9.39 | 0.027 |
| HYB - 8W vs SYNC - 16W (Post-Test) | -17.00 | 0.037 |

Note. Only comparisons with $p < .05$ are reported. HYB = Hybrid; Sync = Synchronous; Async = Asynchronous.

## Discussion

Japanese and Spanish, while structurally distinct and differing in linguistic complexity, yielded some parallel outcomes across session lengths and instructional modalities. Overall, 16-week courses produced stronger results in final grade averages, post-test scores, and language acquisition gains—particularly in Japanese I, a Category IV language requiring extended exposure and scaffolded instruction. For example, the 16-week asynchronous Japanese section in spring 2024 achieved both the highest average post-test score (90%) and the highest retention rate (88%). These outcomes align with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, both of which underscore the value of gradual, scaffolded learning for internalizing new linguistic forms.

Although no statistically significant differences were found across all Japanese session lengths, a t-test indicated that students in the 16-week synchronous section significantly outperformed those in the 8-week hybrid section on post-tests ($t(1) = -17.00$, $p = .037$). This suggests that consistent instructor-student contact time plays a pivotal role in facilitating complex language learning. Furthermore, gains in Japanese I notably favored longer session lengths—especially in the Fall 2023 term—supporting the idea that extended exposure promotes more durable learning in high-difficulty language environments.

In contrast, Spanish I results pointed to stronger outcomes in early compressed sessions. Students in the 5W1 and 8W1 hybrid sections recorded the highest post-test scores and retention rates across all session lengths and modalities, outperforming their 16-week counterparts (e.g., 5W1 vs. 16W post-test: $t(1) = 6.66$, $p = .001$). However, performance in later sessions (8W2 and 5W2) declined markedly in all measured outcomes. This trend may be due to factors such as student fatigue, reduced motivation, or mid-semester enrollment challenges, which can affect persistence and engagement. These findings highlight how not only length, but also timing within a term, influences student success.

Modality also emerged as a key variable. Hybrid and synchronous courses generally outperformed asynchronous formats. For example, the Spanish hybrid–8W1 section significantly outperformed both the asynchronous-8W2 and face-to-face-16W sections on post-tests. These results lend support to Long's Interaction Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of real-time interaction in fostering comprehensible input and learner output. Faculty feedback further substantiated these results; both instructors observed that synchronous and face-to-face learners developed stronger relationships and participated more consistently, while asynchronous students were less engaged and required more individualized support.

Anecdotally, faculty described teaching in compressed formats as "exhausting" and "overwhelming." Sakura and Elena both reported that maintaining the quality of feedback and interaction in shorter terms demanded greater time and emotional investment. Elena noted that several students from her fall 2023 hybrid-8W1 section later re-enrolled in a 16W version of the same course, suggesting that initial gains in shorter terms may not equate to sustained language development. These insights echo Demmans et al. (2017), who emphasized the importance of time and community-building in feedback-rich environments like language learning.

## Significance of the Study

This study adds to the growing body of literature on the impact of session length and instructional modality in second language acquisition, particularly in the under-researched context of community colleges. By focusing on both a Category I (Spanish) and Category IV (Japanese) language, it highlights how language complexity interacts with course format. While much of the existing research has explored compressed courses in STEM or general education, relatively few studies have investigated their effects in beginning language instruction. The findings are especially relevant in the wake of pandemic-era scheduling reforms, as institutions increasingly experiment with shortened terms. Notably, the contrast between early-session (8W1, 5W1) and later-session (8W2, 5W2) outcomes offers actionable insights into how timing and pacing affect language learning trajectories.

## Implications

The findings of this study carry practical implications for instructional planning, faculty support, and student advising:

- Align session length with language complexity: Japanese I learners performed better in 16-week sessions, consistent with SLA research that emphasizes the need for sustained exposure and interaction in more complex languages. Spanish I learners, by contrast, demonstrated success in early accelerated terms when well-supported.

- Interaction matters more than duration alone: Across both languages, modalities with real-time interaction—such as hybrid and synchronous formats—yielded higher post-test scores and retention rates than asynchronous ones. This affirms Long's Interaction Hypothesis and suggests that instructor presence is a key contributor to learner success.

- Shortened terms are not equally effective throughout the semester: Performance in second-session short terms (8W2, 5W2) was consistently lower than in first-session short terms (8W1, 5W1). Institutions should consider offering a multi-tiered system of support, assessments to identify student readiness, or specialized advising for students entering later terms.

- Redesign curriculum while considering faculty capacity: Teaching accelerated courses places significant demands on faculty physically and mentally. Sakura and Elena's experiences highlight the need for strategic planning, support for feedback-heavy instruction, and recognition of emotional labor involved in high-contact formats.

- Student perceptions of success align with communicative course outcomes: When asked what success meant, most students defined it as the ability to hold a conversation. Longer session lengths, with more time for practice and feedback, may be better suited to meet these learner-defined goals.

## Limitations

This study was limited by its sample size and reliance on voluntary participation, which may introduce self-selection bias. Not all sections or instructors were included, and variables such as teaching style, student motivation, prior exposure, and college readiness were not controlled. Moreover, the study did not measure long-term retention beyond final assessments. As such, generalizations need to be made with caution, especially across differing institutional contexts.

## Future Research

Several important areas for future inquiry emerged from this study. First, additional research is needed to determine how these findings extend to other world languages and proficiency levels. The impact of compressed formats on intermediate and advanced learners remains unclear. Second, the role of learner personality traits in modality preference and success warrants further investigation. As Ferguson and DeFelice (2010) note, personality may influence language outcomes, yet this remains understudied. Exploring dimensions such as introversion, extroversion, and self-regulation could provide new insights into optimal course design.

Furthermore, future studies need to explore longitudinal language retention following different modalities and session lengths, ideally incorporating alternative assessments beyond post-tests and grades. Finally, research into curriculum design for accelerated courses -particularly asynchronous and hybrid formats- would be beneficial to support institutions implementing large-scale modality shifts under Guided Pathways reforms.

## Conclusion

This study examined the effects of session length and instructional modality on first-semester Japanese and Spanish language learners in a community college context. Through an approach grounded in quantitative analysis and supported by qualitative insights, the findings highlighted both shared and divergent trends between the two languages. In general, longer session lengths and interactive modalities were associated with stronger student performance and retention—particularly in Japanese, where scaffolded instruction and extended time appear critical for success. Spanish learners, while more adaptable to compressed formats, demonstrated the strongest outcomes in early short sessions, suggesting that timing and pacing are key considerations even in Category I languages.

The research reinforces theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Long's Interaction Hypothesis, emphasizing the pedagogical importance of sustained, meaningful interaction and guided practice. Faculty insights provided additional context, illustrating the emotional and logistical demands of accelerated instruction, as well as the value of student-instructor rapport in fostering engagement and success.

Ultimately, these findings offer timely guidance for institutions navigating evolving course formats in the wake of the pandemic and ongoing enrollment shifts. While compressed terms may offer flexibility and efficiency, they must be matched with intentional curricular design, enhanced student support, and consideration of language complexity. As institutions reimagine course structures, research like this can shape policies that balance flexibility with instructional quality—ensuring that scheduling innovations continue to support meaningful learner engagement and successful language outcomes.

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## Appendix A

*Student Background Survey*

**About this survey:** The purpose of this survey is to gain insight into student retention and success in first-semester language courses to guide decision-making. The survey is anonymous. Please contact [name], the researcher, at [email] with any questions or concerns.

**General instructions:** Please select one answer unless otherwise specified.

**Background Information**

1. I am enrolled in:
   Japanese I  Spanish I
2. My gender is:
   Male  Female  Nonbinary  Other  I prefer not to answer
3. My age range is:
   17 and under  18-20  21-29  30-39  40-49  50-64
   65 and above  I prefer not to answer
4. My student status is best described as:
   Full-time  Part-time  Transfer (enrolled at a two-year institution)
   Transfer (enrolled at a four-year institution)  I prefer not to answer
5. My race is:
   Asian  Pacific Islander  Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   Black or African American  American Indian or Alaska Native  White
   I prefer not to answer
6. My ethnicity is best described as:
   Hispanic  White alone, non-Hispanic
   Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic
   American Indian and Alaska Native alone, non-Hispanic  Asian alone, non-Hispanic
   Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, non-Hispanic
   Some Other Race alone, non-Hispanic  Multiracial, non-Hispanic
   I prefer not to answer
7. The primary (first or native) language I speak at home is:
   English  Spanish  Chinese (Mandarin)  Japanese  Korean
   Vietnamese  Other Asian language
   Other Romance language (French, Italian, Portuguese or Romanian)
   Other language  I prefer not to answer
8. I have studied this language I am enrolled in for this long (check all that apply):
   0 years  1 year or fewer  2 years  3 years  4 years
   I took the AP or IB Exam  I am completely bilingual (speaking, reading, and writing)
   I speak this language at home only  I prefer not to answer

**Academic Standing Information**

9. My current, or most recent, Grade Point Average (GPA is):
   4.0 (an A average)  3.0 (a B average)  2.0 (a C average)  1.0 (a D average)
   0.0 (an F average)  I prefer not to answer
10. The grade I expect in this class is:
    A  B  C  D  F  I prefer not to answer

11. I expect to dedicate this amount of time to this one class per week:
    Less than 1 hour  2-4 hours  5-7 hours  8-10 hours  11-15 hours
    15 or more hours  I prefer not to answer
12. I plan to enroll in the next level of this language class:
    Yes  No  Undecided  I prefer not to answer
13. I plan to enroll in ALL levels of this language:
    Yes  No  Undecided  I prefer not to answer

**Course Preferences and Resources**

14. I am aware of the additional resources available to support me in language learning like my professor's office hours, tutoring, etc.:
    Yes, I'm aware  No, I'm not aware  I prefer not to answer
15. I prefer to take classes in this modality according to our college definitions:
    LEC – Lecture (traditional face-to-face classes that meet on campus)
    HYC – Hybrid Classroom (meets 50% or more of the time on campus)
    DLS – Distance Learning Synchronous (meets virtually on specified days/times)
    ONL – Online Asynchronous (does not meet virtually – word done independently)
16. In the fall or spring I prefer the following session lengths:
    16-week classes (traditional long length offered in the fall or spring)
    8-week classes (accelerated term offered in the fall or spring)
    I prefer not to answer
17. In the summer I prefer the following session lengths:
    10-week classes (traditional long length offered in the summer)
    5-week classes (accelerated term offered in the fall or spring)
    I prefer not to answer
18. This statement best matches my current experience:
    I am only enrolled in 16-week sections  I am only enrolled in 8-week sections
    I am only enrolled in 5-week sections
    I am only enrolled in a combination of 8-week and 16-week sections
    I am enrolled in a variety of session lengths (5-, 8-, 10-, 12-, 14-, 16-week)
    I prefer not to answer
19. The following statement best reflects how I feel about the session length I am enrolled in for my language course:
    I love it and will continue taking this session length.
    I can't stand it and will try not to sign up for this session length again.
    The session length doesn't matter to me.
    I prefer not to answer.
20. Would you like to participate in one virtual focus group this semester to give feedback? If yes, please fill in your best contact information (email or phone). If you answered "Yes" to question # 20, then please add your best contact information below.

## Appendix B

*Japanese Preliminary Assessment*

**Preliminary Assessment** **#____** **NAME_____**

**I. Listening (10)**

Listen to the numbers and write them in Arabic numerals.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

**II. Vocabulary (10)**

A. Write the following words in English.

1. neko _____
2. anata _____
3. konnichiwa _____
4. kore _____
5. tomodachi _____

B. Write the following words in Japanese (use Roman letters).

1. me _____
2. Japan _____
3. book _____
4. hot _____
5. TV _____

**III. Expressions (10)**

Write the appropriate expression for each situation in Roman letters.

(1) _____ (2) _____

I'm sorry. Good evening.


**IV. Q & A (20)**

A. How would you ask in the following situations? You need to find out…(10)

1. the price of sushi. _____
2. the current time. _____
3. where Mr. Tanaka is. _____
4. what Mr. Tanaka will eat. _____
5. Mr. Tanaka's age. _____

B. Answer the following question (10)

1. Kyoo nani o shimasu ka. _____
2. Yoku benkyoo shimasu ka. _____
3. Kinoo anime o mimashita ka. _____
4. Eega ga suki desu ka. _____
5. Ima doko ni imasu ka. _____

## Appendix C

*Japanese Final Exam*

**General Instructions**

--- Do not use a pen

--- Write large, clear, legible characters.

--- You will not lose points for not using kanji, but you will if you use kanji incorrectly. If you are not sure, use hiragana/katakana.

--- Use the **polite** form sentence endings unless specified.

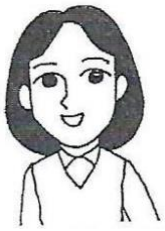
--- Do not use rooma-ji when answering in Japanese.

**I. Listening (10)**

(A) You will hear five statements about Ms. Smith's schedule. Fill in the appropriate boxes in English based on what you hear.

| M | TUE | W | TH | F | SAT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |

(B) Here is a list of three students. Based on the statements you hear, circle T if the statement is true or F if it is false.



| | Mary | Sue | Robert |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nationality | Canada | South Korea | England |
| Year | 2nd year | 3rd year | 4th year |
| Age | 19 | 20 | 28 |
| Major | Engineering | Japanese Culture | Computer Science |

1) T / F 2) T / F 3) T / F 4) T / F 5) T / F

**II. Vocabulary (20)**

(A) Write the following words in English.

1. しつれい
2. あたたかい
3. いっかい
4. ちかい
5. こちらこそ
6. すまい
7. ろっぴゃく
8. かいもの
9. おととい
10. あさって

(B) Write the following words in Japanese.

1. to go back
2. weekend
3. Korean language
4. dinner
5. textbook
6. to read
7. 9:05 a.m.
8. work
9. study
10. Goodbye

**III. Kanji (8)** Write the following Chinese characters in Arabic numerals.

<e.g.> 二（2 )

1. 六 (　　)　2. 四 (　　)　3. 九 (　　)　4. 七 (　　)

5. 八 (　　)　6. 百 (　　)　7. 五 (　　)　8. 十 (　　)

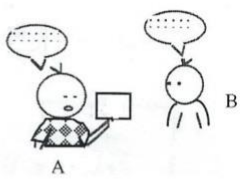
## IV. Grammar (20)

(A) Circle the most appropriate letter/word/phrase in the following dialogues (7)

1)

A: これは { どこ / だれ / なん } の かみ ですか。

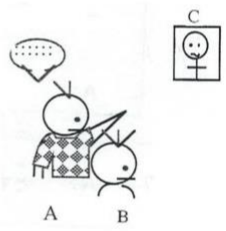
B: { これ / それ / あれ } は わたし { が / の / と } です。




2)

A: { あれ / あの / その } 人は { だれ / なに / どこ } ですか。

B: ブラウンさんです。




A: 大学 { は / の / が } クラスメートですか。

B: はい、 { ちがいます。 / そうです。 / ブラウンさんです。 }

(B) Complete the following dialogues in Japanese. (4)

1) A: カワムラさんは 日本人ですか。

B: いいえ、日本人_____ (1.5)

2) A: すみません。このシャツは_____ (1.5)

B: 650 えんです。

3) A: スペイン語のクラスは_____ (1)

B: かよう日と もくよう日 です。

(C) Circle the appropriate hiragana. (9)

1. ざっし（が、を）すきです。
2. これは 先生（が、の）です。
3. （お、ご） しょうかいします。
4. にちよう日（で、に）としょかん（を、に）きます。
5. それ（を、は）何ですか？
6. はちじ（で、に）おきます。
7. ともだち（を、と）あいます。
8. うち（で、に）ねます。

**V. Reading (20)**

(A) Your Japanese pen pal's friend in Japan wants to study English at your college, but he does not know how to fill out the application in English. Your task is to help him complete the application **in ENGLISH** using the letter written in Japanese you have received. You may see some Chinese characters you don't know, but you should be able to answer the questions.

**こんにちは！ わたしの名前は ニコラス・リーです。はたちです。**

**しゅっしんは、フランスのパリです。 フランス人です。**

**いま、とうきょう大学の三年生です。**

**ほうがくぶの学生です。**

**フランス語と ちゅうごく語と 日本語を話します。**

**えいがと スポーツが すきです。**

**スポーツは とくにテニスがすきです。 どうぞ よろしく。**

**Application Form**

Full Name: _____ Age: _____

Country of Citizenship: _____ Language(s): _____

School Name: _____ Academic Year: _____

Hobbies: (Write in details): _____

(B) Read the following passage about Ms. Moriuchi and answer the following questions based on the passage **in ENGLISH**.

**もりうちさんは せんせいです。**

**まいにち しちじ　よんじゅうごふんに おきます。**

**それからコーヒーをのみます。あさごはんは たべません。**

**もりうちさんは　イタリアりょうりが すきです。**

**ときどき パスタを たべます。**

**きのうよるのじゅうじに ラザーニャをたべました。そして**

**テキサスのビールを のみました。**

**もりうちさんは うんどうが きらいです。**

**あまりさんぽしません。よくえいがをみます。**

**あした、うちで おんがくをききます。**

1. What time does Ms. Sato get up? _____
2. What does she do in the morning? _____
3. What kind of food does she like? _____
4. What did she eat last night? _____
5. What did she drink? _____
6. How often does she take a walk? _____
7. What does she do often? _____
8. What is she going to do tomorrow? _____

## VI. Writing (22)

(A) You are going to interview a newly arrived Japanese exchange student at your college. Since s/he cannot speak English well yet, you are going to ask your questions in Japanese. Write **in HIRAGANA** and use the polite word/prefix if applicable.

<e.g.> 1) Find out his/her telephone # おでんわばんごうは ？

2) Find out his name:

3) Find out his nationality:

4) Find out his/her academic major (s):

5) Find out which school year s/he is in:

6) Find out his/her age:

(B) Find out his/her birth month:

The exchange student will probably ask you the same questions. Write your responses to the questions on page 8 (in JAPANESE). Pretend you are Antonio (See the picture below). Do not use kanji or the Arabic numerals like 1, 2, 3…. **You should be only using hiragana or katakana.**

<e.g.> 1) ここごの　ここごごです。

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

学生 ID

Name: Antonio
Tel #: 555-5555
Age: 18
Birth month: April
Country: Mexico
Grade: Senior
Major: Math

## Appendix D

*Spanish Pre- and Post-Test*
*How's my Spanish?*

**About this survey:** The purpose is to gain insight into student retention and success in first-semester language courses to guide decision-making. The survey is anonymous. Please contact [name], the researcher, at [email] with any questions or concerns. **General instructions:** please select one answer unless otherwise specified.

**A. Communication and Vocabulary**

1. ¿Cómo estás?
   Tengo 20 años. Estoy muy bien. Estoy una estudiante.
2. ¿De dónde eres?
   Soy de Dallas. Soy estudiante. Están de Dallas.
3. ¿Qué deportes practicas?
   Practicar español. Estoy muy bien. Practico fútbol y baloncesto.
4. ¿Adónde quieres viajar?
   Quiero viajar a Costa Rica. Quiero mucho a mi papá. Viajas en la universidad.
5. ¿Cuántas clases tomas?
   Tomo agua y coca-cola. Tomo dos clases. Tomar historia.

**B. Verbs in Sentences**

Please select the best answer to complete the meaning of the sentence.

6. En la universidad yo _____ amigos muy buenos.
   tener tengo tomo
7. Nosotros _____ en la clase de español
   estar somos estamos
8. Los estudiantes _____ en la pizarra todos los días.
   escriben escribir son
9. Después de la clase, _____ a un restaurante.
   vámonos iramos vamos
10. Tú y yo _____ comiendo pizza.
    estamos estar comeremos

**C. A Little Bit of Everything (Un poco de todo)**

11. Los estudiantes de español son _____.
    contenta inteligentes simpáticas
12. La profesora Martínez es _____ profesora de español.
    nuestra nuestros mis
13. Yo estoy _____ en la clase porque tengo sueño.
    Duermo durmiendo dormir
14. La profesora es _____.
    simpática simpático bueno
15. ¿Tomas café por la mañana?
    Sí, los tomo. Sí, lo tomo. No, no la tomo.

**D. Reading Comprehension and Culture**

Please do the following reading to select the best answers for this section.

Mi familia y yo vamos a hacer muchas cosas este fin de semana. Hoy, a las diez de la mañana, voy a pasear en bicicleta. Mi hermano, Marcos, va a ir de excursión a la playa y piensa nadar toda la mañana. A las dos de la tarde voy a almorzar con mis papás. Mañana hay un partido de fútbol. Creo que el equipo de Marcos va a ganar. Luego vamos a la piscina para tomar el sol y nadar. ¿Puedes ir conmigo a la piscina el próximo fin de semana? ¡La natación es fantástica!

16. ¿Quién va a ir a la playa?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mi familia y yo | Marcos | Yo |

17. ¿Qué voy a hacer a las diez de la mañana?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Voy a pasear en bicicleta. | Voy a la playa. | Mi familia va a jugar fútbol. |

18. El partido de fútbol es _____.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| hoy | mañana | a las diez de la mañana |

19. ¿Qué vamos a hacer después del partido?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Vamos a tomar el sol y nadar. | Vamos a ir de excursión. | Vamos a jugar fútbol. |

20. La natación en la piscina es _____.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Terrible | increíble | buena |

## Appendix E

*Faculty Interview Guide*

**Initial Interview in August**

1. Please tell me a little about yourself
2. How long have you been at UCC?
3. When did you first learn about the Brazos 8-week initiative?
4. What were some of the first steps that you are aware of in order to prepare for the 8-Week initiative?
5. How were you supported in this endeavor?
6. Did you participate in any PD or training to prepare yourself for the first day of class? If so, what type? What was it like?
7. How do you feel going into the first week of classes?
8. What is your definition of success as a faculty member?
9. What about success as a student?

**Midterm Interview**

1. Was there any additional professional development and/or training you needed to participate in during this course? If so, please describe.
2. What are your thoughts on the 8-week initiative?
3. What could you have done differently?
4. What worked well?
5. Do you have any recommendations for other campuses and/or institutions on how to better implement these types of initiatives?

**Interview in December at Conclusion of Semester**

1. Now that the semester has concluded, do you have any additional thoughts or suggestions for me?
2. What changes might you make for the spring term to your curriculum?
3. How have you needed to reconceptualize your teaching?
4. Would you recommend that other institutions attempt this 8-week initiative? Please explain.
5. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share with me?

## Appendix F

*Student Focus Group Interview Guide*

**Initial Interview in August**

1. Please tell me a little about yourselves.
2. How did you hear about the Brazos 8-week initiative?
3. What piqued your interest about this initiative?
4. What are you all studying?
5. Why are you taking these language courses?
6. What other courses have you taken at UCC?
7. What are some challenges that you have encountered in your language course? Or in any of your 8-week courses?
8. How have you addressed these challenges?
9. What are some benefits of enrolling in an 8-week course?
10. How do you define success? What does this look like to you?
11. Have you enrolled in the next course level?

**End of the Term**

1. You mentioned you had enrolled in the next level, are you still enrolled?
2. Do you plan on continuing to sign up for 8-week courses? Please explain.
3. What could we as an institution have done differently?
4. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share with me?