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Japanese University Students' Perceptions of Flipgrid in English Discussion Class

Posheng Vincent Chien
Rikkyo University, Japan
vincent.chien@rikkyo.ac.jp
poshengchien@gmail.com

Japan has a high mobile phone penetration rate, and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) are still developing in Japan. Previous research revealed that MALL tools were rarely used in school settings. This study investigated Japanese first-year students' perceptions of a free online video-sharing community software, Flipgrid, in English discussion classes in, Japan. Students' perceptions were measured using Cha and Kwon's (2018) extended Technology Acceptance Model. This mixed methods research utilized two sets of questionnaires and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings of the study suggest that students' perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use were comparably positive and there was a significant increase in the perceived ease of use after experiencing Flipgrid due to its mobility and similarity to social networking applications. This study concluded with learners' general perceptions of Flipgrid and suggestions for future and research.

Keywords: Flipgrid, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, Technology Acceptance Model, Technology-Enhanced Language Learning

Introduction

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has developed rapidly over the past decade and grown its popularity in the field of language teaching and learning (Hsu, 2013). Recently, researchers have suggested a switch from the name CALL to Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) due to the flexibility and mobility of MALL, which offers learners an opportunity to learn "anywhere, anytime"(Gonulal, 2019; Hsu, 2013; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Liaw & Huang, 2011). Gonulal (2019) explained that MALL was widely considered to be a language learning experience on mobile devices not restricted to a specific location or time. Previous research revealed that even though Japan boasts high technological development and that educational technology has often been discussed in conferences and seminars (e.g. Nakayama & Ueno, 2008), many students, in Japan, have only had the most informal practice in actually learning about technology (Kondo et al., 2012). Due to the spread of COVID-19 and the sudden shift to online classes the implications of technology-assisted learning are one of the issues educators have recently begun to consider and study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of Flipgrid, an educational platform, in freshman's English discussion classes in Tokyo, Japan and to understand how Flipgrid can benefit both students' speaking ability and enhance their learning experience. The study aims to provide a better understanding of students' perception of the use of Flipgrid using Davis' (1986) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Cha and Kwon's (2018) extended version of TAM and in addition to reveal how students' willingness to use the technology can change after engaging in the program.

Flipgrid is free online video software that students can use to share their own videos and respond to others' videos and in doing so, enhance communication between students (Casarez et al., 2019). Instructors can create educators' accounts and a group for each class with topics for students created within each group. Students can join using a unique group 'flipcode' given by the instructor, which controls access to the group and videos.

They can respond to the topics by uploading their own videos, while also, upon submission, reply to their peers' videos. An example might be a student can make an introductory video and interact with other students within the group, or answer questions posed. The goal of Flipgrid is to help students a) build connections with each other online, and b) form an online community (Bartlett, 2018; Delma, 2017; Gamble & Wilkins, 2014; Okumura, 2016).

Literature Review

Implications of Online Video-sharing Platforms

Online video sharing platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Flipgrid started to gain popularity after Web 2.0 was introduced in early 2000. Web 2.0 can be defined as knowledge-oriented and interactive webpages that offer two-way communication and collaboration (Aşıksoy, 2018; Pantano & Tavernise, 2009; Thomas, 2009) and its technologies offer learners an opportunity to interact, share, and collaborate easily. Numerous studies have been conducted in the past decade to investigate and explore the implementation, effectiveness, and perceptions of these tools in education settings.

Firstly, the technology promotes a learner's motivation to learn (Jaramillo Cherrez, 2019). Learners can control their learning and eventually become independent learners (Aşıksoy, 2018; Kawinkoonlasate, 2019; Kessler, 2018; Navarre, 2019; Webb & Doman, 2020). They are offered the ability to choose the contents of learners' interests using technology tools (Thomas, 2009). Gonulal (2019) conducted a study to investigate English language learners' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of Instagram as an English learning tool and the results were positive ($\alpha = 0.94$, M = 4.2 out of 6, SD = 0.8). The flexibility and ease of use promoted the learning experience and learners' willingness to use this technology (Jaramillo Cherrez, 2019).

Secondly, online sharing platforms help strengthen the relationships between students (Delmas, 2017; Gamble & Wilkins, 2014; Okumura, 2016). In Casarez et al.'s (2019) study, Flipgrid was used to enhance interaction between students in an online program and the participants reported a better understanding of their peers via Flipgrid than using the traditional blog features on the learning management systems websites. The participants felt a strong connection and that a community was built via Flipgrid.

Thirdly, these tools enhanced learners' communication skills. Jaramillo Cherrez (2019) concluded in the study that Flipgrid helped to improve learners' communicative performance in a user-friendly environment. The platforms create the environment for learners to practice and apply the target language (Gonulal, 2019). Brine et al. (2015) also reported that video-making offered students opportunities to communicate with each other in the target language. With the development of TELL tools, learners are more engaged with each other in the target language (Green & Green, 2017).

Technology Acceptance Model and Extended Technology Acceptance Model

Davis (1986) created the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to examine technology users' perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU). PU was defined as to what extent users believed technology could enhance their work performance and PEU was defined as how easy or effortless it is to apply the technology at work (Davis, 1989). In this study, Davis concluded that PU should be taken into consideration for future implementation or design of technology.

Cha and Kwon (2018) examined the factors that influenced students' acceptance of e-learning, the Internet-based learning involving online resources, media, and mobility which was not limited by time or space, in South Korea, using an extended version of Davis's (1986) TAM. Their findings are presented in Figure 1 below. In the study, they not only applied TAM, but also examined different variables, such as instructor characteristics (IC), teaching materials (TM), perceived mobility (PM), and perceived connectedness (PC)" (p.170). Table 1 below defines the variables Cha and Kwon measured. The participants (n = 213) had experienced e-learning in their management course prior to taking the survey and the results were reliable ($\alpha > 0.8$). The results also

further validated the influences of the variables. First, the instructor's characteristics (β = .226, CR = 4.042, p < 0.001) had a positive effect on participants' PU. Second, PM (β = .573, CR = 8.275, p < .001) had a positive impact on PEU. Third, PC (β = .573, CR = 8.275, p < 0.001) proved to positively affect participants' intention to use. Another finding indicated that if users' instructors were willing to provide feedback, the intention to use e-learning strengthened as well. This paper provides a general background for this current study.

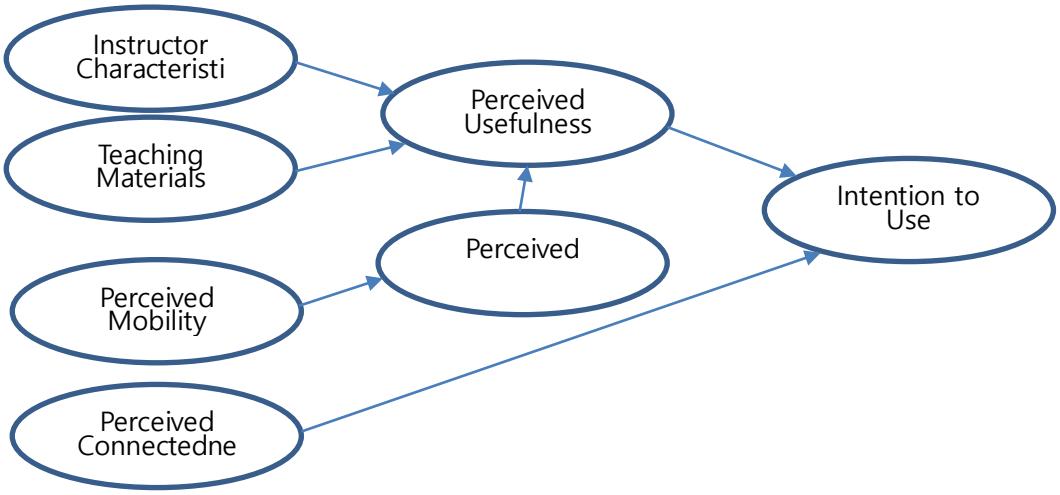

Figure 1: Proposed Research Model (Cha & Kwon, 2018, p.171)

Table 1
Definitions of the Constructs (Cha & Kwon, 2018)

Constructs	Definitions
IC	Are the instructor's assistance and guidance clear and helpful throughout the experience?
TM	Is the teaching material suitable for the technology?
PM	Do the participants think it is convenient to use the technology?
PC	Do the participants feel connected to their peers?

Research Questions

1. What is the perceived usefulness of Flipgrid among students?
2. What is the perceived ease of use of Flipgrid among students?

Methodology

Participants

One hundred and five first-year students at a Japanese university in Tokyo participated in this research project and they were all required to take compulsory English discussion courses. In the year 2020, the discussion courses, in question, were delivered online due to the spread of COVID-19 and of the one hundred and five students sixty-seven participants were female and thirty-eight were male; ninety-nine participants were Japanese, four were Chinese, and two were South Korean. Before the start of the semester, all participants had taken an in-house TOEIC, an international test of English, and twenty-eight participants had scored 680 and above (CEFR B1 and above), forty-eight had scored 480-679 (CEFR B1), and twenty-nine 280-479 (CEFR A2-B1). The participants had started English classes at the age of 12 at the latest as English is a compulsory subject in junior and senior high schools in their respective countries. Fifty-three participants reported that they had been

learning English for more than seven years. Thirty-four participants reported that they had experience studying abroad. This sample group seems comparable to the target population and might have the potential to represent the target population.

At the target university, all the courses were shifted online just before the semester started and all students were forced to learn, join lessons, and complete tasks and assignments online with the minimum of notice. Every course instructor had to revise their syllabus and delivery of the lessons, including the foreign language courses. The English discussion course, so revised, required students to read an article about the discussion topics before joining the lessons via Zoom, a video conferencing software. To ensure that students had acquired the input from the articles and to improve peer interaction, the participants had to answer three after-reading questions and share their thoughts on the topic in question while also uploading a video on Flipgrid every week. Students could then watch each other's videos and add video comments. The participants were encouraged to practice their answers before they recorded themselves and to reply to others afterwards. In order to maintain the quality of the videos posted, the instructor watched and added comments to all videos for the first 5 weeks. The Flipgrid project required participants to spend roughly 30 minutes to an hour per week answering the after-reading questions and replying to others for a period of 11 weeks.

Research Tools

Questionnaire 1. The first questionnaire process was conducted before the participants started Flipgrid. During the first lesson, participants learned the outlines of the course, expectations, and assignments. The participants were also introduced to Flipgrid and the video submission guidance before taking the survey. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The first part consisted of factual questions, used to investigate facts about the participants (Dörnyei, 2007) and the items investigated students' backgrounds, such as regular use of technology and English learning background (Gonulal's, 2019) . The second part consisted of attitudinal questions, used to investigate respondents' opinions, thinking, and attitudes (Dörnyei, 2007). Table 2 below shows the constructs, their respective Cronbach's Alpha, and sources. Items in each construct were presented using multi-item and Likert scales. The third part of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions. Both qualitative data and quantitative data were collected and analyzed.

Table 2
Constructs of the Questionnaire 1

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Sources
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	0.925	(Davis, 1989; Cha & Kwon, 2018)
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	0.720	
Willingness to Use (WU)	0.864	Created by the researcher
Confidence in Speaking English (CS)	0.775	

Questionnaire 2. The second set of questionnaires was conducted after 11 weeks of exposure to Flipgrid. Table 3 below again shows the constructs, the Cronbach's Alpha, and sources of the items. Items in each construct were also presented using both multi-item scales and Likert scales. The results show that the items are reliable ($\alpha > 0.7$). To compare the results before and after the exposure to Flipgrid, the four constructs from the first questionnaire remained. The second part of questionnaire 2 consisted of open-ended questions that were employed to investigate the reasons for the close-ended questions and participants' opinions towards Flipgrid. Both qualitative data and quantitative data were collected and analyzed to support one another.

Table 3
Constructs of the Questionnaire 2

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Sources
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	0.850	(Davis, 1989; Cha & Kwon, 2018)
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	0.913	
Instructor Characteristics (IC)	0.863	(Cha & Kwon, 2018)
Teaching Materials (TM)	0.795	

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Sources
Perceived Mobility (PM)	0.876	
Perceived Connectedness (PC)	0.719	
Intention to Use (IU)	0.860	
Self-assessed English Ability		(Gonulal, 2019)
Attitude towards Using (AU)	0.906	
Willingness to Use (WU)	0.848	Created by the researcher
Confidence in Speaking English (CS)	0.897	

Result and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2 are shown in Table 4 and Table 5. As presented in Table 4 below, participants (n=105) were relatively positive about most of the construct except for CS. The score indicated that most of the participants disagreed that they were confident in speaking English.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire 1

Construct	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
PU	3.78	0.680	4	2	5
PEU	3.57	0.724	3	2	5
CS	2.71	1.085	2	1	5
WU	3.57	0.833	3	1	5

The results from the samples shown in Table 5 below demonstrate that the participants were positive about all of the constructs. It is apparent that the participants strongly agreed that Flipgrid was easy to use and the instructor helped improve the experience during the project. Most of the respondents replied 4 (agree) to PU, PM, and Attitude towards Using Flipgrid. However, there were some fluctuations noted between the first questionnaire and the second questionnaire.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire 2

Construct	Mean	SD	Mode	Min	Max
PU	3.65	0.777	4	1	5
PEU	4.30	0.757	4	2	5
IC	4.67	0.528	5	3	5
TM	3.70	0.897	4	1	5
PM	3.91	0.848	4	1	5
PC	3.44	1.029	4	1	5
IU	3.32	0.905	3	1	5
AU	3.65	0.863	4	1	5
CS	3.11	1.075	3	1	5
WU	3.33	0.893	3	1	5

Correlation

Table 6 below presents the correlations between all of the constructs. The data displayed could also help explain the factors that influenced learners' perception of Flipgrid.

Table 6
Correlations Between all Constructs

	PU	PEU	IC	TM	PM	PC	IU	AU	CS	WU
PU	1									
PEU	.136	1								
IC	.232*	.240*	1							
TM	.557**	.455**	.324**	1						
PM	.394**	.573**	.252**	.568**	1					
PC	.628**	.310**	.409**	.521**	.549**	1				
IU	.664**	.170	.253**	.487**	.454**	.711**	1			
AU	.728**	.182	.327**	.327**	.468**	.757**	.782**	1		
CS	.309**	.060	.095	.135	.048	.310**	.318**	.284**	1	
WU	.663**	.151	.244*	.459**	.415**	.636**	.713**	.777*	.436**	1

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$

Qualitative Data Themes

Table 7 below presents the top themes that arose after coding the answers to the open-ended questions collected from the participants. From the first questionnaire, most of the participants were worried about their English ability and the operation of Flipgrid; however, they were still positive in believing Flipgrid would help them improve. From the second questionnaire, it was apparent that the participants agreed that Flipgrid helped improve their confidence in speaking English and interacting with their peers; however, some participants still revealed their reluctance to using Flipgrid in the future.

Table 7
Top Qualitative Data Themes and Frequencies

First Questionnaire					
Confidence		**Concerns**		**Attitudes**	
Themes	**Frequency**	**Themes**	**Frequency**	**Themes**	**Frequency**
no practice	30	operation	51	interaction	26
poor English	30	English Skill	13	share videos	25
nervous	11	nervous	10	Practice English	30
Second Questionnaire					
Confidence		**Ease of Use**		**Improvement**	
Themes	**Frequency**	**Themes**	**Frequency**	**Themes**	**Frequency**
gain confidence	42	operation	70	opportunities	38
opportunity	40	Social media	6	pronunciation	13
instructor's help	12	instructor's help	8	scripts	5
Usefulness		**Preference**		**Willingness**	
Themes	**Frequency**	**Themes**	**Frequency**	**Themes**	**Frequency**
opportunities	32	embarrassed	26	fun interaction	29
communication	25	interaction	25	follow instructors	20
mobility	14	improvement	11	shy	11
scripts	5	fun	13	other applications	5

Perceived Usefulness

The participants' PU towards Flipgrid was comparably positive. The results showed there was a slight decrease from pre-treatment (M = 3.78, SD = 0.680) to post-treatment (M = 3.65, SD = 0.777), but the difference was not significant ($t(104) = -1.490$, $p > 0.05$). The mode remained 4 (agree). Overall, the figures indicated that the majority of the learners were positive about the usefulness of Flipgrid.

Communication and interaction played one of the key roles in the outcome (Delma, 2017; Gamble & Wilkins, 2014; Okumura, 2016). Around a quarter of the participants reported that one reason they enjoyed Flipgrid was that they could interact and communicate with their classmates. Due to the spread of COVID-19, students were learning from home and it was almost impossible for the participants to meet their peers. Flipgrid served as an online platform where students could meet and share ideas in their own time. A second reason the participants enjoyed Flipgrid was that they could actually see and hear each other, unlike blogs or forums, thus echoing Bartlett's (2018) article. One student stated, "Flipgrid was useful. Although we don't have a chance to meet people in the same class due to the pandemic, Flipgrid gives us an opportunity to see each other which leads us to a sense of closeness and familiarity." This corresponded to the correlation between PC and PU ($r = 0.628$, $n = 105$, $p < 0.01$).

Learners' attitudes towards Flipgrid also played key role in contributing to PU (Gonulal, 2019). There was a strong correlation between learners' attitude towards Flipgrid and PU ($r = 0.728$, $n = 105$, $p < 0.01$). Just over a third, 33%, of the responses indicated that they believed Flipgrid was useful because it offered opportunities to practice English. Several students pointed out, "I did not have a chance to speak English at home or outside class, but Flipgrid gave me a lot of opportunities to speak English." The participants believed that Flipgrid was useful in both improving their speaking skills and motivating them to speak English.

The third important factor influencing PU was ease of use and PM. Statistically, there was not a significant correlation between PU and PEU ($r = 0.136$, $n = 105$, $p > 0.05$), but there was a modest correlation between PU and PM ($r = 0.394$, $n = 105$, $p < 0.01$). The coded qualitative data gave further explanations. First, some participants suggested that Flipgrid was easy to use and helpful compared with the tasks given in other courses (Gamble & Wilkins, 2014), which mostly involved writing and reading, while Flipgrid provided a different way to complete an assignment. Second, 14 students mentioned that they thought Flipgrid was useful because they could use it "anywhere and anytime." Third, it was deemed helpful that learners could watch the video before submission and if they were not satisfied, they could record another video (Gamble & Wilkins, 2014). About ten responses suggested that the learners checked their pronunciation and intonation before they posted the videos.

Although the drop in PU from Questionnaire 1 to Questionnaire 2 was not significant, several comments from the participants might explain and perhaps provide suggestions for future implementation. First, one student states, "I don't think it's useful because I only read from my scripts." This comment might be referring to English ability or fluency, so an activity could be implemented to help promote learners' fluency. Second, two students mentioned that they did not get replies or feedback from others, and were disappointed about the loss of interaction. It is understandable that when one speaks, there should always be a listener to provide feedback (Bygate, 1989). However, in Japan, a lot of students are silent, even in an actual class (King, 2012) and Japanese students are not used to giving feedback or asking questions (Chien, 2020). This is a potential issue that future researchers and instructors might need to solve.

Perceived Ease of Use

One hundred and four participants reported that they had never experienced online learning before the experiment and none had heard of Flipgrid. Prior to the experiment, the participants reported their PEU and the results were relatively neutral (M = 3.57, SD = 0.724, Mode = 3). Nearly 50% of the open-ended responses implied the participants thought it might be difficult to use Flipgrid. After the participants had submitted their responses, one of the participants sent an email apologizing for replying 3 (neutral) to most of the items because

she was not familiar with Flipgrid and asked if she could change her answers after several weeks. This suggests that before the participants had actual hands-on experience, they could not decide whether Flipgrid was easy to use.

After experiencing Flipgrid, the participants reported their PEU and the results were increasingly positive ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.757$, Mode = 4). The difference was statistically significant ($t(104) = 8.270$, $p < 0.001$). Based on the learners' open-ended responses, three themes emerged which could aid in explaining the results. First, 70% of the participants reported that the operation of Flipgrid was simple and convenient: one reason was the functions, such as editing and recording, were easy to use; another was the user-friendly interface, it was easy to navigate through Flipgrid. The second theme was the similarity of Flipgrid to social media applications, as indicated by some participants with their positive attitude towards the interface (Bikanga Ada, Stansfield, & Baxter, 2017). Five percent of the responses suggested that having the Flipgrid application on their mobile phones also improved the ease of use, which explains the positive correlation between Ease of Use and PM ($r = 0.573$, $n = 105$, $p < 0.01$). This convenience and freedom offered the learners an opportunity to take control of their learning (Aşıksoy, 2018; Kawinkoonlasate, 2019; Navarre, 2019). Third, 5% of the responses implied that the instructors' guidance and explanation were clear and helped the learners as they started using Flipgrid. During their introduction to Flipgrid, the instructor demonstrated to the participants how to join the group, make a video, reply with a video, and apply special effects and also made them an explanatory video for reference when needed. as we know an instructor's guidance could very well affect a learner's ease of use (Cha & Kwon, 2018). In conclusion, learners' PEU had positive relationships with simple operations, mobility, and instructors' assistance.

The relationship between learner's PU and PEU ($r = 0.136$, $n = 105$, $p > 0.05$) was not significant, which echoed the study of Wang et al (2011). This finding contradicted Cha and Kwon's (2018) results. In their study, PEU had a positive influence on PU. Davis' (1989) study explained that PEU should be the pre-existing factor before that of PU. However, in the present study, the association was not visible.

Intention to Use

The data revealed that the learners' IU in the future is relatively neutral ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.905$, Mode = 3). There was a strong correlation between the learners' PU and IU ($r = 0.728$, $n = 105$, $p < 0.01$), and a similar result was reported in Davis' (1989) TAM research. The slight drop in PU from Questionnaire 1 to Questionnaire 2 may have had some bearing on the result of IU. Besides the pros and cons mentioned earlier in this paper, 26 participants also reported that they felt embarrassed about showing their videos to their peers and recording themselves speaking English. Eleven students mentioned that they were too shy to be willing to use Flipgrid in the future. On the other hand, 29 students mentioned in the questionnaire that Flipgrid enhanced interaction with their peers and this motivated them to continue using Flipgrid in the future. The result validates the correlation between PC and IU ($r = 0.711$, $n = 105$, $p < 0.01$) and it also resonates with Cha and Kwon's (2018) finding that PC has a positive impact on the learner's intention to use. In conclusion, to improve learners' IU, future instructors should try to improve learners' PU and PC.

Conclusion

This study investigated students' perceptions of Flipgrid in English discussion class. The results showed that the participants were relatively positive about Flipgrid. First, learners' PU of Flipgrid was positive because they had more opportunities to communicate and interact with their peers and they could practice English anywhere anytime. Learners' PU also proved to have a positive relationship with the IU. Second, learners' PEU was strongly positive because the operation of Flipgrid was simple and easy to learn and the interface was similar to social networking applications. Instructors' guidance was also reported to be beneficial. However, the results of learners' willingness to use Flipgrid were not as positive as other constructs, perhaps because Japanese students prefer teacher-centered lessons where the teachers give lectures at the front of the classroom most of the time while the students listen quietly at their seats (Brown and Muller, 2014; Hsu, 2013). This is, to some extent a cultural attitude and is not an easy problem to solve. In general, the participants reported more advantages of Flipgrid than disadvantages.

The main role of this study is to provide suggestions and support to English Language Teaching practitioners who want to try Flipgrid in their teaching. Sometimes, it is hard to accept changes or to accept that technology can be utilized in learning environments for both learners and instructors. The results of this study demonstrate that learners are comparably positive about the use of Flipgrid.

Limitations of the study

First, the sudden shift to online learning might have affected the results. For example, some students expressed their preferences not to use Flipgrid in the future, but this might come from the sudden over-exposure to online learning technologies. Another example is that the students in this project had never met their peers in person, so theoretically, every opportunity to interact with their peers could enhance their relationships. Originally, the experiment was designed for face-to-face students. In order to get a relatively more pure result, the participating classes should be divided into focus groups and control groups; in this way, the result might show learners' actual attitudes towards Flipgrid and TELL tools and whether Flipgrid can enhance learners' relationships and communication with each other.

Second, students' persistence in using the Flipgrid did not last until the end of the experiment (Jaramillo Cherrez, 2019). This may be explained by some students starting to feel fatigued by repeating the same tasks (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), while other students might start working part-time or become too busy due to a large number of assignments. This might have affected the amount of feedback the participants offered to their peers and the effort they put into making the videos.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Apart from the limitations mentioned earlier, there are some suggestions for future researchers. For one, students might have chosen to stay neutral instead of giving their honest answers, and in Japan it is very common for students not to choose sides because they are taught to maintain harmony (Martin, 2004). To minimize the issues this might cause, some open-ended questions are recommended to specifically investigate the reasons behind the answers. Another recommendation is that a study of Flipgrid could be conducted with face-to-face classes and Flipgrid could serve as a technology-enhanced language learning tool that provides the environment outside the classroom. It would be beneficial to learn what students' perception of Flipgrid is for students online, in blended learning students, and on-site situations.

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