
Technology Matters

Exploring the Efficacy and Challenges of Flip in English Language Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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This research paper examines the use of Flip as an instructional tool for English language learners during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. In this study, I investigated the level of difficulty experienced by participants, the number of completed assignments, the extent of video interaction, and the effectiveness of Flip in enhancing English language proficiency. My findings reveal Flip's capacity to foster peer interaction while underscoring its limitations as a tool for learners facing challenges in blended learning environments.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 compelled educational institutions across Japan to adapt rapidly. Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) mandated the temporary closure of schools below the secondary level (MEXT, n.d.). As the pandemic persisted, public and private universities transitioned to remote instruction.

This sudden shift posed logistical challenges. First, educators and students needed to establish effective online communication methods. Second, the digitization of course materials and their seamless transmission became imperative. Educators and students harnessed video conferencing applications like ZOOM and Google Meet to facilitate online interactions. Simultaneously, they adopted learning management systems such as Moodle, Manaba, and Google Classroom for digitizing and sharing course content. Flip, a video-sharing website, emerged as a unique platform enabling learners to create and exchange video-based assignments.

This study explores the experiences of 218 students who were non-English

majors from three universities in Fukuoka Prefecture who engaged with Flip during the 2020 academic year. This study examined the following questions.

Do students perceive Flip as:

1. A resource for engaging with course material?
2. A means of nurturing connections with peers?
3. An effective technology for navigating the course?

Originally named Vidku in 2014 and rebranded as Flipgrid in 2016 (How Flipgrid changed its name to Flip, now offers free education, 2022, August 29), researchers have used the application known as Flip since 2022 in EFL classrooms for various purposes, resulting in diverse outcomes. McClure and McAndrews (2016) underscored Flip's role as a video response tool for out-of-class assignments, complementing in-class learning by enabling students to respond to prompts or questions, enhancing reflective development and public speaking skills. Green and Green (2018) found that students perceived Flip as a user-friendly technology for English-speaking assignments outside class. Moreover, it emerged as a tool in mitigating communication anxiety, as a majority of students reported heightened confidence in spoken English. Edwards and Lane (2021) provided a nuanced perspective, revealing diverse student reactions to Flip. While some found it easy to use and enjoyable for peer interaction, others grappled with technical glitches and experienced embarrassment when posting videos. Despite these challenges, Flip emerged as a valuable asset for facilitating student interactions, enhancing language skills, and deepening students' understanding of classmates.

To investigate variables similar to those explored in the aforementioned studies, I adopted aspects from The Model for Engaging the Online Learner (Bartlett, 2018). Within this framework, I concentrated on three variables influencing online learners' engagement levels. Specifically, I focused on: (1) Course engagement, which pertains to a student's perceived connection to the course material; (2) Peer engagement, reflecting a student's perceived connection to their peers; and (3) Technology efficacy, addressing a student's perceived ability to effectively utilize the necessary technology for navigating the course.

Methods

Participants

The research cohort comprised 218 students enrolled in English conversation classes targeting CEFR A1 and A2 levels (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR], n.d.). Instruction for these classes occurred via ZOOM or on-demand video, conducted once a week in 90-minute sessions. The curriculum spanned 15 weeks and encompassed six units from the course textbooks *Four Corners Student's Book 1* and *Four Corners Student's Book 2*. Additionally, students received weekly assignments and completed two progress tests.

Flip

Flip, an accessible and cost-free video-sharing platform, provided participants with the means to engage in English language practice. Participants joined Flip groups corresponding to their English conversation classes. Over the semester, the instructor posted 12 assignments to each Flip group. Flip assignments featured questions requiring video responses, with each one being limited to three minutes. Responses had to be in English, incorporating vocabulary and grammar from the previous week's lesson. Moreover, each response had to be posted within five days of the respective class session, becoming visible to the instructor and fellow group members once uploaded.

Survey Administration and Design

At the conclusion of the semester, participants voluntarily completed a bilingual survey (available on request) using a Google Form. This survey was designed to capture participants' subjective experiences and opinions. Most survey items employed a tripartite response structure to facilitate comprehensive feedback. The first two response options presented participants with choices embodying opposing sentiments (e.g., "easy/difficult" or "enjoyed/hated"). In contrast, the third option provided an open-ended space for participants to articulate their thoughts in their native language. Participants were encouraged to utilize their native language when opting for this third response type.

Subsequently, these responses were translated into English using Google

Translate during the data analysis phase. These translated responses were categorized into thematic topics, affording a nuanced comprehension of participants’ perspectives and insights regarding their interactions with Flip.

Results

In total, 218 students completed the primary and follow-up questions of the survey. Among the open-ended inquiries, the highest response count was 126 as seen in Figure 1 and Table 1.

In Figure 1, the horizontal axis represents categories related to the usage of Flip. *Ease of Use* indicates that 57% of respondents found Flip easy to use. *Completion Rates* reflect that 71% of participants completed more than half of the Flip assignments. *Peer Videos Viewed* indicates that 87% of respondents watched their peers’ videos before creating their own. *Challenges* suggest that 68% of participants experienced difficulties in expressing themselves effectively on Flip. *Preference for In-Person Practice* shows that 62% of respondents favored

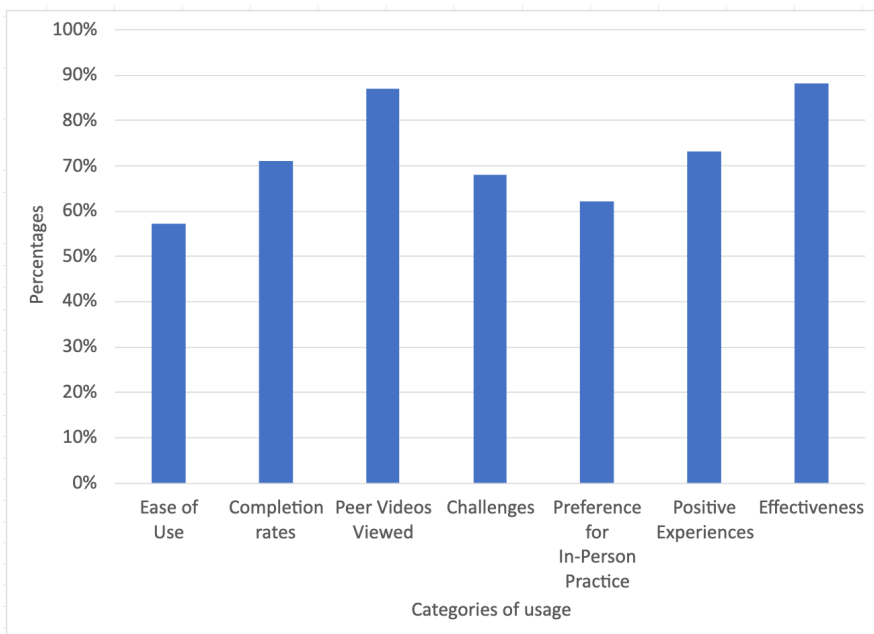


Figure 1. Flipgrid usage responses.

Table 1*Open-Ended Questions*

	Tech problems	English level	Other	
What was difficult about Flip?	44%	48%	8%	
	Utility	Curiosity	Entertainment	
Why did you watch other student's videos?	86%	12%	3%	
	English level	Confidence	Tech problems	Other
What difficulties did you have expressing yourself on Flip?	71%	13%	8%	9%
	Joy	Convenience	Relatability	Other
Why do you prefer making a Flip video over speaking to a classmate in English?	11%	47%	31%	11%
	Interactivity	Meaning	Joy	Stimulation
Why do you prefer speaking to a classmate in English over making a Flip video?	39%	35%	19%	6%
	Sociability	Viewpoint diversity	Utility	Expression/ other
What did you enjoy about Flip?	29%	16%	24%	31%
	Exposure	Difficulty	Other	
What did you hate about Flip?	46%	46%	8%	

in-person English practice over using Flip. *Positive Experiences* indicates that 73% of participants reported enjoying their Flip experience. Finally, *Effectiveness* demonstrates that 88% of respondents considered Flip an effective tool for practicing English.

Responses to the survey's open-ended questions highlighted that a significant portion of students, 48%, faced difficulties primarily related to their English proficiency when using Flip. An instance of a translated response conveying this sentiment was, "I'm not good at thinking about sentences." Additionally, 86% of the students watched other students' videos for their utility. A frequently echoed translated phrase that conveys this sentiment was, "To help make my video." Expressing themselves on Flip was found to be challenging for the majority, with 71% attributing this difficulty to their English proficiency. Convenience was a significant factor, with 47% of the students preferring to make a Flip video over engaging in direct English conversations with their classmates. Finally, 31% of respondents found Flip satisfying because of its potential for personal expression, while 46% had concerns regarding potential exposure. Among those concerned about exposure, numerous translated responses featured the word "embarrassed."

Discussion

The findings from the survey shed light on students' perceptions of Flip as a versatile tool for English language learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the data illustrates that students perceive Flip as a robust resource for engaging with course material, as evidenced by the high assignment completion rate and the active involvement of most students. Notably, many participants expressed that watching their peers' videos before creating their own helped them prepare their responses and foster a sense of camaraderie within the class, emphasizing the platform's role in nurturing connections with peers.

The survey also highlighted several challenges encountered by students, such as difficulties stemming from inadequate English proficiency, self-confidence issues, and technical impediments. Furthermore, while students preferred in-person English practice over Flip, those who reported positive experiences emphasized its role in improving their English language skills, promoting peer

interaction, and providing a forum for self-expression. On the other hand, students who reported negative experiences cited feelings of embarrassment, discomfort, and technical issues. Despite these challenges, the consensus among the participants was that Flip remains an effective technology for navigating the course, indicating its significance in facilitating English language learning despite the difficulties encountered.

A phased approach could address the challenges students experienced with embarrassment and technical issues, starting with audio-only Flip assignments at the beginning of the semester before gradually incorporating video assignments. This approach aims to familiarize students with the technological aspects of Flip and foster a more comfortable environment for interaction with their classmates.

The participants were from three universities, so the results cannot be readily extrapolated to broader demographics. For example, the technological challenges experienced by the participants in this study may differ from those encountered by individuals in different countries or with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that Flip may not be an optimal solution for learners with limited English proficiency, self-confidence concerns, or technical constraints. Providing details about the setting, participants, and observed phenomena might enhance transferability. Such information can help readers evaluate how this case might relate to their circumstances.

Conclusions

This study sheds light on the effectiveness of Flip as an English language learning tool during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan, particularly in the context of three variables: course engagement, peer engagement, and technology efficacy.

One of Flip's notable strengths is its capacity to foster peer interaction and enhance students' enjoyment of language learning. Moreover, the high rate of assignment completion observed in this study suggests that students' perceived connection to the course material is substantial, an essential aspect of course engagement.

However, the study also highlights the emergence of technical issues as a concern. These issues introduced a diverse perspective on students' ability

to effectively use the necessary technology for navigating the course, a critical dimension of technology efficacy. Additionally, a notable portion of participants preferred in-person practice, underscoring the value of physical classroom interactions for certain learners. Future research and educational strategies should consider these factors to create a more comprehensive and effective language-learning experience for students.

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Author Bio

Soren Leaver, a native of the United States, has served as an EFL lecturer at multiple universities in Kyushu since 2015. He has a Master's degree in TESOL from Anaheim University and enjoys exploring the integration of technology to enhance both the teaching and learning processes. sorenzo1@yahoo.com

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