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Facilitating Student Interaction: The Role of Flipgrid in Blended Language Classrooms

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Abstract

In this action research project, 189 first-year Japanese university students were introduced to Flipgrid, an online video discussion platform, as a means to facilitate communication and interaction with peers in the absence of traditional face-to-face communicative activities. This paper presents a discussion of the learners' perceptions of Flipgrid and the role it played in facilitating interaction in an English communication course. The implementation of Flipgrid in the course is introduced before a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from online surveys. Results were derived from an analysis of Likert-scale items and an emergent thematic analysis of open-ended survey questions. The data suggest that while some learners are hesitant to use Flipgrid, it has the potential to provide an effective platform for interaction and communication in a digital environment.

Keywords: computer-assisted language learning, EFL, Flipgrid, student interaction, video discussion boards

Facilitating Student Interaction: The Role of Flipgrid in Blended Language Classrooms

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it great challenges and unpredictability for educators and students around the world. Schools and universities have been forced to continue teaching in settings where social distancing has pushed education to new limits. Face-to-face classes have been heavily restricted or moved online, and students have been unable to interact and communicate with peers as normal. As more schools and universities are shifting to online learning environments, students often lack the interaction and communication with classmates that are commonplace in traditional face-to-face settings. This presents a need for language teachers to consider new methods and tools to promote communicative environments where students can interact and develop their language skills.

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Although online tools cannot fully replicate authentic face-to-face classroom experiences, they do provide a medium to bridge the distance of online interaction (Blake, 2005).

This research project investigated the use of Flipgrid, an online video-based discussion tool, to facilitate student interaction and explore student perceptions of the application as a communication tool. Scaffolded support worksheets were utilized to make the assignments more accessible for students and to help them complete the tasks on Flipgrid. The scaffolds acted as a guide or support for students to help them complete their tasks and improve their language skills (Walqui, 2006). Considering the impacts of COVID-19 on traditional educational environments, helping students to develop their language skills through online methods has become even more important to the efficacy of these scaffolds was also explored during the project.

Literature Review

A common approach to integrating technology into online or blended learning classrooms has been the use of discussion boards (Hammond, 2005). Online discussion boards are spaces where students can engage with course content and communicate together. Online discussion boards have also been shown to benefit both ESL and EFL students by offering opportunities to share their experiences and to develop closer relationships with their classmates in online classrooms (Birch & Volkov, 2007). In a study conducted by Goda and Yamada (2013) using online asynchronous discussion boards, the social presence of classmates appeared to yield more language production in EFL classrooms. Compared with text-based online discussion boards, the use of video-based discussion boards can increase student connectedness and increase the perception of an authentic interaction by offering students important social cues such as facial expressions and emotions through voice (Clark et al., 2015). In blended language classrooms, the use of video-based discussion boards has also been shown to have a positive impact by increasing language ability and engendering closer peer interaction (Svokos, 2019).

While video-based discussion boards can offer greater benefits to language students than text-based ones, there are also issues to consider such as privacy concerns, student reluctance, and technical problems. Specialized video-based discussion applications, such as Flipgrid, attempt to address some of these problems that teachers and students face. Flipgrid is an online video discussion tool that offers students a platform to discuss ideas, communicate with their peers, and practice their language and presentation skills. It has proven popular with educators because it is easy to set up and introduce to classes, and students can quickly engage in recorded online video-based conversations from teacher prompts class topics or other media. The application can easily be accessed through an internet browser or a smartphone application for both Android and iOS mobile users.

Researchers and teachers have been integrating Flipgrid into their classrooms in a variety of ways including as a replacement for text-based discussion boards (Green & Green, 2018), assessing students' speaking skills (McLain, 2018), improving students' presentation skills (McClure & McAndrews, 2016), increasing student engagement (Bartlett, 2018), and

practicing English communication skills (Petersen et al., 2020). Although research on the use of Flipgrid in language classrooms is limited, asynchronous video-based discussion tools such as Flipgrid may offer solutions to the challenges language teachers encounter in the move away from traditional face-to-face classrooms due to emergency remote teaching restrictions or distance learning requirements.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching and learning opportunities at the authors' university were greatly affected. Prior to the pandemic, English communication courses had been based on intensive face-to-face speaking practice with class time centered around student communication, improving spoken output, and building conversational ability in speaking English. Course objectives included the ability to "engage in simple conversations on topics that are familiar, of personal interest, or pertinent to everyday life" and to "initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversations." However, due to university classroom restrictions, the students in this study were unable to communicate or interact together face-to-face. Therefore, a decision was made to use technology to overcome some of these limitations and to find a blended learning approach that would allow students to interact, share stories, and learn more about each other through asynchronous conversations online.

This study focused on three main research questions:

1. What are students' general perceptions of the Flipgrid application?
2. What is the role of Flipgrid in promoting student interaction in an online environment?
3. What are students' general perceptions of the Flipgrid scaffolded support?

Methodology

Research Project Design

In the English communication course in which this action-research project was conducted, students used Flipgrid for seven weeks by making videos about a topic connected to units in the course. Students were also encouraged to make video replies to two of their classmates' videos for each unit. The topics for the videos ranged from self-introductions and hometowns to university life and travel. Student videos were limited to one minute and thirty seconds per video, and the assessment of the project was based on participation to emphasize communication rather than performance. This Flipgrid project contributed to 10% of students' overall grades in the course.

Scaffolded support worksheets were designed to give students language practice with the content of each topic and to provide support when making their videos on Flipgrid. The first section of the support worksheets contained a list of questions about the course's topics (see Appendix A). After completing the questions, the students chose four of their answers to focus on in their Flipgrid videos. In the second section, the students circled the keywords of their answers to complete the support table (see Appendix B). Students then used this support when recording their Flipgrid videos. The support table was also designed to

encourage the students to create the language at the moment or as they recorded their videos instead of memorizing sentences or reading from a pre-written script. The envisioned aim of the support table was to help students sound more natural and authentic in the Flipgrid videos.

Participants

The participants in this study were comprised of 189 first-year Japanese university students from seven departments: Computer Information Systems (n = 32), Art (13), Design (30), Mechanical Engineering (31), Architecture (34), Aerospace Engineering (20), and Life Science (29). Among the participants, 142 were males and 47 were females. Students had no prior experience with using Flipgrid as an English communication tool before this project. Although all students were assigned the Flipgrid tasks for the course, 18 of the 189 students did not complete any of the assignments. All participants expressed their informed consent prior to the gathering of survey data from this study.

Research Instruments

This study gathered quantitative and qualitative data using a web-based survey administered at the end of the course. The survey was delivered via Google Forms with student laptops in the classroom. It consisted of three sections: general perceptions, student interaction, and the Flipgrid scaffolded support worksheets. There was a total of 11 Likert-scale items. A scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree) was chosen for the Likert-scale items to more accurately determine students' positive or negative perceptions of the application (Cohen et al., 2016). Six open-ended questions were also employed to gather qualitative data. An open-ended question immediately followed each of the three sections of the survey, and three items were specifically directed towards students who did not participate in some area of the study (did not use Flipgrid, did not make video replies to classmates, or did not use the Flipgrid scaffolded support table).

Survey items that reflected the context of this study were created by the authors before being discussed and chosen by a focus group of colleagues at the institution. The selected survey items were translated into Japanese by native Japanese-speaking colleagues. The survey was then piloted with one class of 31 students to identify any potential issues with the survey items. Minor adjustments were made to the order of the survey items before the final employment of the survey. Face-to-face interviews were originally scheduled to collect additional qualitative data but were canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions at the institution.

Data Analysis

Likert-scale items were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics to help answer the three research questions. An emergent thematic analysis was conducted by the two authors to identify the main themes and issues found in the open-ended question data (Cohen et al., 2016). In addition to increasing the validity of the results, it was anticipated the qualitative analysis would provide a better understanding of the quantitative data. For this paper, all

student results will be shown in the translated English format. Original responses and data gathered for this study are available from the authors by request.

Results

General Perceptions of Flipgrid

Students' general perceptions of Flipgrid were mostly positive. As seen in Table 1, most participants agreed that making videos on Flipgrid was enjoyable (M = 3.88; n = 171) and the application was easy to use (4.34). Students were satisfied with their English in their Flipgrid videos (3.72) and by the end of the course, most students felt comfortable using Flipgrid to make communicative videos (3.94). However, many students (3.99) displayed concern about their classmates viewing their videos.

Table 1
General Perceptions of Flipgrid

	Likert Scale							
Survey Item	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**M**	**SD**
I enjoyed creating Flipgrid videos.	7	11	34	70	41	8	3.88	1.12
Flipgrid was easy to use.	3	6	24	57	59	22	4.34	1.09
I felt comfortable making videos on Flipgrid.	10	9	41	53	38	20	3.94	1.29
I was worried about my classmates watching my Flipgrid videos.	11	15	22	61	41	21	3.99	1.34
I was satisfied with my English ability in my Flipgrid videos.	4	9	55	69	31	3	3.72	0.96

There were 218 instances from the students' responses to the open-ended question *What are the advantages and disadvantages of using Flipgrid?* (see Table 2). Among the themes that emerged, 143 instances were advantages identified by the researchers and 75 were disadvantages. The most frequent advantages reported were increased communication (45 instances; e.g., *I was able to communicate with everyone*), student interaction (33; e.g., *It was a great way for students to interact with each other in class during COVID-19)*, learning more about classmates (28; e.g., *I was able to get to know my classmates*), and that the application was easy to use (22; e.g., *You can take a video and upload it immediately*).

Table 2
What are the advantages and disadvantages of using Flipgrid?

Advantages Themes	**Instances**	**Disadvantages Themes**	**Instances**
Communication	45	Difficult to use	21
Easy to use	22	Embarrassing	14
Interaction	33	Interface	5
Interface	15	Limited	7
Learning about others	28	Technical problems	18
		Task design	10
Total	143	Total	75

Among the disadvantages, students mentioned that the application was difficult to use (21; e.g., *The bad thing is that the submission process was difficult to understand*), they encountered technical issues (18; e.g., *There were times when I made a video and it wouldn't upload*), or they felt embarrassed doing the task (14; e.g., *I think a lot of people don't like [Flipgrid] because they still don't feel comfortable putting their faces out there*).

Eighteen students did not use Flipgrid or participate in the tasks, and they were asked to write their reasons for not participating (see Table 3). There were 18 instances from the students' answers. The main reason was that students felt confused with the task (8) or said the application was difficult to use (3).

Table 3
Why did you not use Flipgrid?

Themes	**Instances**
Confusion	8
Difficult to use	3
Embarrassing/privacy	4
Time-consuming	3
Total	18

Student Interaction

Students were asked to post a reply to their classmates' videos as part of the Flipgrid activities each week. The survey results on student interaction were divided into two groups: students who replied to their classmates' videos and students who did not reply to their classmates. This was done to compare and understand the perceptions of interaction among the two groups of students. Among students who replied to classmates (see Table 4), results displayed stronger feelings of student interaction. Many of the students felt that Flipgrid helped them to interact with their classmates (M = 4.23; n = 119) and that they were able to communicate with their classmates (4.29). Most students also enjoyed learning about their classmates by watching their videos (4.63). In contrast, students who did not reply to their

classmates' videos (see Table 5) were generally less positive about Flipgrid helping them to interact (M = 3.54; n = 52) or communicate (3.15) with their classmates. These students were also less likely to enjoy watching their classmates' videos (3.87). Based on the results, replying to students' videos increased the perception of student interaction and enjoyment of watching their classmates' videos.

Table 4
Student Interaction: Students Who Replied to Classmate Videos

	Likert Scale							
Survey Item	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**M**	**SD**
Using Flipgrid helped me to interact with my classmates.	1	4	18	51	34	11	4.23	0.99
I enjoyed learning about my classmates by watching their videos.	2	3	5	41	44	24	4.63	1.04
I was able to communicate with my classmates by asking them questions.	2	2	14	53	38	10	4.29	0.96

Table 5
Student Interaction: Students Who Did Not Reply to Classmate Videos

	Likert Scale							
Survey Item	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**M**	**SD**
Using Flipgrid helped me to interact with my classmates.	2	8	14	20	4	4	3.54	1.20
I enjoyed learning about my classmates by watching their videos.	2	6	5	27	8	4	3.87	1.17
I was able to communicate with my classmates by asking them questions.	5	11	14	16	5	1	3.15	1.21

For the open-ended question *Did you enjoy using Flipgrid to interact with your classmates?* responses were also divided into students who did and did not reply to classmates' videos. The themes identified from the response to this question closely resemble those of the previous section on general perceptions of Flipgrid.

Overall, the majority of students who interacted directly with classmates using Flipgrid enjoyed the experience (see Table 6). Responses from students who replied to their classmates' videos were overwhelmingly positive (127 of 158 instances). Thematic analysis revealed that students enjoyed interacting with their classmates through Flipgrid for three main reasons: they enjoyed learning about their classmates (61; e.g., *Through Flipgrid, I got to know my friends and made more friends*); communicating with their classmates was fun (44; e.g., *It was fun and I enjoyed it because it was like a video call*); and they enjoyed the

interaction with their classmates (22; e.g., *It was fun to interact with each other because we didn't know each other*).

Some students also mentioned issues when using Flipgrid to interact with classmates. One prominent theme was that Flipgrid was *limited* (16 instances). This term was used to describe responses that appeared to demonstrate that Flipgrid was not the same as face-to-face interactions (e.g., *It didn't feel like much of an interaction because it wasn't a real-time exchange*). A small number of participants who mentioned issues also noted that interacting with classmates was embarrassing (8; e.g., *I still got nervous with people I didn't know well at times*) or not fun (7; e.g., *Since everyone was acting like they were doing a task, it didn't develop into an interaction and it wasn't much fun*).

Table 6
Did you enjoy using Flipgrid to interact with your classmates? Why/why not? (Students Who Replied to Classmates' Videos)

Positive Themes	**Instances**	**Negative Themes**	**Instances**
Fun	44	Embarrassing	8
Interaction	22	Limited	16
Learning about others	61	Not fun	7
Total	127	Total	31

Students who did not post a video reply to their classmates were less positive about using Flipgrid to interact with peers (see Table 7). Among the 53 instances found in the responses, some felt that the task was not fun (8; e.g., *I didn't enjoy it because I didn't ask questions*) or that there was no student interaction using Flipgrid (5; e.g., *I didn't interact with my classmates*). However, despite not replying and thereby not directly interacting with classmates, some of these students were still positive about Flipgrid. For example, students noted that Flipgrid was fun (12; e.g., *I could relate to everyone's hobbies and interests, so it was fun*), they enjoyed learning about their classmates (9; e.g., *It was fun because I got to know more about the people in my class*), and that the task promoted interaction (9; e.g., *Through Flipgrid, we got to know each other's interests and had a chance to communicate*). Therefore, while students who did not reply to their classmates were less positive about using Flipgrid to interact, the thematic analysis revealed that some students still had positive things to say about it.

Table 7
Did you enjoy using Flipgrid to interact with your classmates? Why/why not? (Students Who Did Not Reply to Classmates' Videos)

Positive Themes	**Instances**	**Negative Themes**	**Instances**
Fun	12	Difficult to use	4
Interaction	9	Embarrassing	4
Learning about others	9	No interaction	5
		Not fun	8

		Time-consuming	2
Total	30	Total	23

Perceptions of the Flipgrid Scaffolded Support

Of the 171 participants who used Flipgrid, 150 utilized the Flipgrid scaffolded support table when making their videos. Students' impressions of this scaffold were positive (see Table 8), noting that the support table helped them when speaking English in their Flipgrid videos (M = 4.67; n = 150) and that it helped them to recall their ideas (4.75). Many participants also felt that using the scaffold made them more confident when speaking English (4.30).

Table 8
Student Perceptions of the Flipgrid Scaffolded Support Table

	Likert Scale							
Survey Item	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**M**	**SD**
The Flipgrid support table helped me when speaking English in my Flipgrid videos.	3	1	3	59	54	30	4.67	0.97
The Flipgrid support table helped me to recall my ideas when making Flipgrid videos.	3	1	5	49	56	36	4.75	1.01
Using the Flipgrid support table made me more confident when speaking English.	4	3	19	58	50	16	4.30	1.06

Of the 161 instances from student responses to the open-ended question *What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Flipgrid scaffolded support table?* (see Table 9), 142 were identified as advantages. For many, the scaffold appeared to make the task easier to do (56; e.g., *The support only shows the important parts of the conversation and words, so I could use it to think up sentences on my own and look at the support when I got stuck, which helped me to challenge myself in English*). Many students stated that the scaffold helped them to remember what they were going to talk about (35; e.g., *I liked the fact that I didn't have to worry about forgetting what to say*) or felt that the scaffold helped them with their language skills (23; e.g., *I was able to speak English smoothly by writing key words on the support sheet*). Finally, some felt that the scaffold support table helped them to create and visualize their sentences as they made their Flipgrid videos (16; e.g., *I thought it was a great way to get used to speaking English because I was able to think about the key words in my head as I spoke*).

There were a few disadvantages apparent from the data, some regarding the task design or layout of the scaffolded support worksheets (8; e.g., *There are not many English examples, so it's hard to refer to them*), while others preferred to read their scripts and sentences rather

than use the scaffolded support table (6; e.g., *Sometimes I couldn't remember my sentences from the key words).*

Table 9
What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Flipgrid Scaffolded Support Table?

Advantages Themes	**Instances**	**Disadvantages Themes**	**Instances**
Create	16	Couldn't remember	6
Easier to do task	56	Limited	5
Easier to remember ideas	35	Support/task design	8
Organize/summarize	12		
Language skills	23		
Total	142	Total	19

An open-ended question was also aimed at students who chose not to use the Flipgrid scaffolded support table (see Table 10). These students were asked why they did not use the scaffold to make their Flipgrid videos. The most frequent theme among the 20 instances concerned confusion on how to utilize the scaffold support table while completing the Flipgrid tasks (8; e.g., *I wasn't sure how to use it*).

Table 10
Why did you not use the Flipgrid Scaffolded Support Table?

Themes	**Instances**
Confusion	8
Difficult to Use	4
Memorized	4
Unnecessary	3
Total	20

Discussion

Students' general perceptions of Flipgrid indicate that Flipgrid was easy to use and that using it to communicate with peers was enjoyable. However, not all students were positive about using Flipgrid. Some students found Flipgrid to be difficult to use and experienced technical issues, mentioning confusion due to the English-only interface and problems with uploading videos. Some students also felt embarrassed when posting videos of themselves. While students may be familiar with sharing videos online in their daily lives, sharing videos with new classmates can be intimidating.

The results suggest that Flipgrid was a beneficial tool in helping students interact with their classmates. The data show that a large number of students enjoyed using Flipgrid to

learn more about their classmates and that Flipgrid can be a good tool to facilitate student interactions in online or blended learning environments. However, some participants felt that Flipgrid was limited and that it was not an effective alternative to face-to-face conversations. Nonetheless, most students enjoyed using Flipgrid to interact together and they valued the opportunity to learn more about their classmates.

While 171 participants in this study used Flipgrid, 52 students did not post a reply or comment on their classmates' videos. Compared with students who did not reply to classmates' Flipgrid videos, those did experience stronger feelings of interaction with their peers. Both the quantitative and qualitative results suggest that posting replies to classmates' videos increased feelings of interaction and overall positivity with Flipgrid.

Students were very positive about the scaffolded support used to complete the Flipgrid video tasks. Most students felt that the scaffolded support table made the task easier to do, helped them remember their ideas, and helped improve their language skills. Overall, these results suggest that the scaffolds were effective at supporting students' learning and in helping them to interact and communicate online. When communicating using online video discussion platforms, the scaffolded support table can help students to remember their ideas and focus on communication rather than performance.

Limitations and Pedagogical Suggestions

There are several limitations of this action research project. First, establishing a control group to compare data with experimental groups would enhance the results and validity of this study. There is also concern about the diversity of student perceptions given that the participants of the current study consisted only of first-year Japanese university students with limited experience of language learning after secondary education. Students with different educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds should be included in future studies. Finally, conducting interviews with the participants, collecting teacher observations, and including more researchers for data analysis could provide more detailed data for similar studies on the use of Flipgrid.

Based on student responses to Filpgrid and their own experience using the application in the course, the authors would like to propose several suggestions for educators considering the use of Flipgrid in their classrooms:

1. Place a strong emphasis on student reply videos to increase student perceptions of community and interaction. Many students complete their original Flipgrid videos but never take part in discussion through the reply function. Student replies should be an integral part of the activity design rather than a supplemental feature. For example, student replies could be graded on a low-stakes basis to reward students and promote interaction with peers.
2. Consider ways of reducing student embarrassment and privacy concerns: As revealed during our study, students may feel embarrassed sharing videos of themselves with their classmates. To address this, use non-threatening topics at the beginning of the course. An example would be for students to create a simple introduction video about themselves or

speak about another safe topic. In addition, teachers should post an example video for each new topic so that students are not anxious about being the first to post a video. Finally, students who are reluctant to record videos of their faces, stickers, emojis, or other customization features on Flipgrid can be used to reduce embarrassment or privacy concerns.

3. Provide sufficient support: When learning online, students often need more support than in traditional face-to-face classroom environments. This support should include technical support (teaching students how to use Flipgrid) as well as task-based support (teaching students how to do the task). Learning support can take various forms such as PDF guides, online video explanations, and teacher demonstration videos.

Conclusion

As technology has become an inseparable part of our daily lives, educators no longer need to ask why we should use technology in the classroom but how we should use it and make it more accessible and meaningful for students (Ertmer et al., 2012). There is a vast array of tools available for educators, and our research project shows that Flipgrid is a viable option for language teachers looking to provide their students with opportunities to interact with peers and to practice their communication skills. The results from this study suggest that students enjoyed using Flipgrid to interact with their classmates and they especially enjoyed learning more about their peers. In addition, the data showed that students had very positive experiences using the scaffolded support worksheets. This scaffold helped students to practice the language and to complete the Flipgrid tasks more easily. However, not all students enjoyed the task or interacted with peers, so more thought should be given to improve participation and engagement through Flipgrid. As a result, implications of this study and recommendations for using Flipgrid as a communication tool were also discussed. As technology develops and the use of alternative communication platforms in language teaching becomes more prevalent, it is important to find the best tools that can help students succeed and connect with peers in new ways. Moreover, as COVID-19 restrictions remain at institutions around the world, online video discussion tools such as Flipgrid may prove beneficial in providing interactive environments for students in the absence of traditional classroom settings.

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Appendix A

Sample of Scaffolded Support Worksheet Questions

QUESTION		ANSWER	+1
Ex.	Where have you traveled?	I have traveled to many prefectures.	I have visited Okinawa, Tokyo, and Hokkaido.
1	Where have you traveled?		
2	Where is your favorite place that you have traveled?		
3	What did you do when you traveled?		

Appendix B

Sample of Flipgrid Support Table

Step 1: Please choose 4 answers from your TRIPS & TRAVEL – FLIPGRID QUESTIONS. (*Answer* and +1). Circle the key words or phrases in your answers.

Ex.) I have traveled to many prefectures.

For example, I have traveled to Okinawa, Tokyo, and Hokkaido.

Step 2: Next, write your key words in the boxes below. Do not write full sentences.

KEY WORDS 1		KEY WORDS 2
ex	prefectures	Okinawa, Tokyo, Hokkaido
1		
2		
3		
4		