

Social and Academic Impacts of CoViD19 - related Emergency Remote Teaching on Japanese University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study will detail how a university in Western Japan has implemented its English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program during the onset of CoViD-19. In the spring semester of 2020, after a 2 week delay, all courses within the school's EAP program were offered in an online asynchronous format. The course coordinators were tasked with consolidating the materials originally designed for face-to-face, 14 week courses, for a 12 week asynchronous online semester, and with uploading the modified course materials to the university's Learning Management System (LMS). Twenty one students participated in semi-open interviews to determine the social and academic impacts of this CoViD-19 Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) approach. The lessons learned from this experience will be discussed in terms of future curriculum design and implementation in a post-CoViD world. There are a wide variety of lessons that were salient. The role of the classroom as a social institution was very prominent; however, awareness of cognitive burdens and strategies to mitigate them may be more valuable for teachers. The lessons learned during this period of ERT can help teachers moving forward.

Keywords— asynchronous online learning, emergency remote teaching (ERT), online curriculum design, CoViD19

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic that started in Wuhan, China in 2019 took the world by surprise. The Japanese academic school year starts in April, and most Japanese universities were not prepared in April 2020 for the increasingly alarming news and government broadcasts that dominated the media at that time. Some universities made the switch to online lessons immediately, while other schools chose to delay the start of the academic year to assess their online teaching capabilities and wait for guidance from the Ministry of Education, Sports, Culture and Technology. Most Japanese universities have invested into some form of Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Blackboard, Manabe, or Moodle, etc., but very few have used them to deliver their programs entirely online (Murakami, 2016; Vallance, 2008). While this type of e-learning has been shown to facilitate the learning process during a lockdown (Zwain, 2019), many Japanese students are averse to using this type of technology in their studies (Murakami, 2016). According to research in the field of e-learning, it is important for higher education institutions to seriously consider what criteria will affect the students' acceptance of technology (Ma & Yuen, 2011), because failure to achieve this aim will result in diminished returns on the huge investments made into the LMS and other platforms used for online lessons (Zwain, 2019). The degree of students' technological acceptance varies depending on geographical regions: while university students in Western countries seem to be tech savvy and willing to learn online (Decman, 2015), the rate of technological acceptance for Middle Eastern students was found to be relatively low (Matar et al., 2011). Raza et.al have used the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model to analyze Pakistani university students' adaptation and performance with Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) during the Covid-19 pandemic. The UTAUT model considers factors such as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, social isolation, as well as attitudes towards and usage of LMS. The researchers also introduced "Corona fears" as a variable in their analysis. Their findings showed that the main factors mitigating students' acceptance of the online learning were how the LMS was introduced to them by their instructors, the perceptions towards technology of their social peers and family, and their perception of the user-friendliness of the system (Raza et.al, 2021). The researchers caution that these findings reflect the general attitude of Pakistani university students, and that future studies need to be carried out in other countries, since attitudes might also be influenced by culture and nationality (Raza et.al, 2021).

A lot of the studies on the use of LMSs in Japan have focused on the perspective of the teacher, not that of the students (Bateson, 2008; Bateson, 2009; Nozawa, 2011; Hirschel, 2012). Although learners' characteristics play a crucial role in the effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for the purpose of learning English as a foreign language, these characteristics have not been fully researched for the Japanese context (Ozawa, 2019).

This study will attempt to paint a picture, from the perspective of a group of Japanese university students, of the social and academic impacts of their first ever asynchronous, on-demand online semester of study. The students who participated in the study are all undergraduates in their first or second year of study at a private university in Western Japan.

The English Communication Program Background

The English Communication (EC) program described here is a 2 year program embedded into a School of Policy Studies at a Japanese university. The students are not English majors: they are majors in fields related to Policy Studies. However, the EC Program itself is quite rigorous: it's a 2 year course within a four year degree that is very challenging and focused on English for academic purposes. It was originally designed to develop students' ability to join English as a Medium of Instruction work in their third and fourth year. The EC program is highly coordinated, so that there is vertical integration within the 2 year courses. For example, each writing class is not seen as a separate, individual course, but as four parts of a single writing class within a two year period. There is also horizontal integration, which means that the skills learned within a presentation class are also used in the seminar, which is a speaking or discussion class. This results in a highly effective level of coordination which requires a great deal of management from full-time teachers. There are 11 full-time instructors managing 45 part-time workers. The full-time teachers also develop all the in-house materials, so that the relevance and the level of efficacy needed from this course can be maintained.

Spring 2020 Semester

In Japan, the school year begins in April. In the spring of 2020, this put the EC program staff in a peculiar situation because the semester was beginning just as the first wave of the pandemic struck. The start of the academic year had to be delayed by two weeks, during which time the 11 full-time teachers had to develop asynchronous course work for the classes that everyone was going to be teaching. One of the benefits of having in-house materials was that there was no need to seek permission from publishers to post online. Since the department was not aware of the students' access to WiFi or devices, it was decided that lessons will be delivered on demand asynchronously. In other words, teachers could not use Zoom or other platforms to provide live lessons. The materials were uploaded to LUNA, the university's learning management system, which is a version of Blackboard. Students could access their course materials on LUNA, submit homework assignments and take tests on the same platform. Communication with students was to be carried out through emails and the discussion boards on LUNA. Teachers were available to their students during office hours, which were not mandatory and were scheduled to take place on Zoom. This was the only opportunity the students had to meet their teachers live. Other platforms used were Turnitin.com (a site where students can submit their writing drafts), XReading.com (a digital library for implementing extensive reading), and OneDrive (a file hosting service operated by Microsoft).

Methodology

This research was focused on understanding the student experience in involvement in ERT during the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic by answering two research questions.

Research Question 1: How do students socially interact and develop social support networks during ERT?

Research Question 2: How do students perceive the impact of ERT on their academic experience and performance?

Participants

In the summer of 2020, 21 (14 female, 7 male) first and second year undergraduate students, who had just finished their first ever online asynchronous on demand semester of study, volunteered to be interviewed about their experience. Students were recruited through email from the entire English Communication program. Students who volunteered were provided a minor compensation for their time. The semi open-ended interviews were conducted on Zoom, in both English and Japanese. The transcripts of the interviews were typed with the participants' identifying information omitted, to be subsequently read and analyzed for emerging themes by the authors.

For phenomenological research, it is suggested to have a sample size between five and 25 subjects (Polkinghorne, 1989). Through in depth interviews which provide contextualization, this sample size provides a broad range of experiences and allows for salient similarities to appear.

Instruments

The authors decided to utilize a semi-open interview using an instrument similar to the one developed by De Soire et al. (2012). Validity was examined by first examining the instrument and personally answering the questions. Next the authors discussed the items to address any possible issues. The item was re-examined after the first few interviews to identify any issues in lieu of a pilot study. These procedures are based on the procedures outlined by Maxwell (2013).

Subjects were provided with an informed consent form prior to the interview, which was reviewed prior to the interview. Students were informed specifically about the purpose of the interview, how data would be handled, and the right to refuse questions or leave the interview at any time.

Questions were divided into five sets. The first was to provide general background information. The second was to provide an understanding of their overall experience with the phenomena. The third was to provide information on academic experiences. The fourth was to provide information regarding social experiences. The fifth and final set provided understanding into work-life-study balance and opened the door for any further information that subjects wished to include.

Results

First the data collected by each researcher was read (Maxwell, 2013). Each author proposed conceptual frameworks to aid in the initial coding. The use of a conceptual framework aids in identifying appropriate coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data was examined for themes that could help answer the research questions. Other emergent themes were also noted, in particular economic issues. Once each author coded the data they compared their results to improve reliability.

Analysis

Upon carefully reviewing the interview transcripts, some common themes began to emerge: socially stagnant social networks, a desire for the social aspect of the classroom, significant economic issues, work-life-study balance problems, a vague dissatisfaction with pedagogy, and a lack of useful feedback.

Emerging Theme	Number of participants mentioning item
• Work-Life-Study Balance	18
• Socially Stagnant Networks	14
• Economic Issues	9
• Dissatisfaction with Pedagogy	19

I. Work-Life-Study Balance

The balance between the social, academic, and economic aspects of their lives was sometimes difficult. Students seemed to think that acclimation would be easy to achieve, but many of them lacked the discipline and time management skills needed to stay on track in an on-demand asynchronous program, and they reported having a difficult adjustment period.

“I didn’t really work during the semester: I only started working during summer vacation, so life-study-work balance was not so bad. But having to manage my own time and discipline myself was really hard.” (1st Year Student)

“Life-study-work balance at first seemed easy. I mean, I lived at home, my parents cooked for me, so I could eat, even if I had to study during that time. But it was hard to schedule my own time for studying every day. I am a freshman, so I am not used to this on-demand online style. If you can get used to it, it’s great. After I got used to it, it was okay: I could decide my own time to study, to work part-time, to relax, but it took a while.” (1st Year Student)

“I enjoyed the fact that I didn’t have to wake up early to join classes, but the issues was timing myself without a proper schedule.” (2nd Year Student)

“Work-life-study balance was pretty hard to achieve. Freshman year, it took me 5 hours to go to school and come home and right now, it’s true that I had 5 hours free to study. However, I ended up working those 5 hours and more at my part-time job, so I was even busier than I would usually be.” (2nd Year Student)

“I had difficulty of studying, this was the first time for me of remote studying. The most difficult point for is we have to motivate ourselves to study. It’s different when we are on campus, we can talk to our teachers and classmates. I think this is the most important: motivation. We don’t know how to motivate ourselves alone.” (2nd Year Student)

Another issue was that even though in this program teachers tried to decrease the overall workload, students felt like they had to do more work. Activities that they would do with a partner or a small group, had become homework, meaning it felt like more work, even though it was in fact the same amount of work.

“There was a lot of homework, so I didn’t have a lot of free time. That part was hard.” (1st Year Student)

“It was hard for me. The EC classes were too hard. Including Monday to Sunday I worked 10 hours on the computer every day. It was too hard.” (2nd Year Student)

“Now, even now I don’t know college life, so I feel nervous. I don’t know college studying and college class and teachers, and friends. I don’t have friends. I feel anxiety. Always anxiety. I check Luna and [the school] homepage and updated homework. This semester I had so many tasks. I have anxious.” (1st Year Student)

Balancing work, social interaction, and school is difficult for many students. Students who had not planned to enter into an asynchronous program were given an additional hurdle. While many of the students asserted an acclimation by the end of the semester, it is important to note that the amount of perceived work increases when the workload shifts from in-class group activities to individual “homework” activities. This perceived increase in workload adds to the overall stress of students and makes it more difficult for them to feel comfortable with their work-life-study balance.

II. Social

Socially stagnant networks: Although all students interviewed complained of limited opportunities to interact with peers, it seems that first year students were more severely affected. This is because while second year students could take advantage of pre-existing social networks they were able to form in their previous year at university, incoming freshmen did not have this resource to draw on. This seems to have affected not only the social life of new students, but also their ability to perform well in school, as reflected in the quotes following:

“I didn’t really have many friends, so I couldn’t really get much advice about tests and homework in my classes.” (1st Year Student)

“The most stressful thing for me was that I am so shy, and I didn’t know anyone at this school, so when I couldn’t understand what to do for my classes, I was really anxious and frustrated.” (1st Year Student)

For some, using applications like Line, a social media application popular in Japan, and Zoom, allowed them to connect with classmates and even make friends:

“I could make friends on Line through help groups set up for students from our department. We mostly talked about class work, but we could also talk about other things and hang out (online).” (1st Year Student)

“Of course, Line, Instagram, and WhatsApp is how I contacted my friends. Of course, I felt isolated, but one of the student is my neighbor, so I did a lot of tasks and assignments with him, so I didn’t feel that isolated like other students.” (2nd Year Student)

However, this social media interaction was mostly limited to exchanges about schoolwork, and was not as timely and enjoyable as regular face to face exchanges:

“[My] writing [class] is using one appli, Turnitin. I talked to my Line group how to use Turnitin. We only talk about class thing and Luna. I have not met friends of first year.” (1st Year Student)

“We contacted each other to talk about discussion boards or upcoming tests, but we only talked about class related stuff.” (1st Year Student)

“Line and Instagram were good to keep in touch with my friends. Those applis are good for that. I found it really kind of isolated. In school, whenever I had a problem I could ask my friends, but at home, I had to wait until they read my messages. And it took time to write to them. So I felt kind of isolated and didn’t really talk about other than the homework things. At school we talk about life things, too.” (2nd Year Student)

One upperclassman suggested that the university needs to set up networking opportunities, so that incoming students can meet seniors and they can help each other adapt. However, the school administration needs to take an active role in doing this.

“The school should make connections between seniors and juniors, because seniors can speak with them in Japanese, and understand them better if they have some problem, and then we can help each other. But school needs to make this connection for us.” (2nd Year Student)

The disparate affect between those without developed social networks (primarily first year students) and those with established social networks was apparent. While the feeling of isolation may be more salient for students lacking a pre-existing network, even for those who have a network, there was a sense of stagnation. Interpersonal relationships seemed to stand still, awaiting a return to normalcy.

Desire for a social aspect of the classroom: Most of the students interviewed indicated that they would like to interact with each other in synchronous lessons.

“I was really looking forward to communicating face to face with native English speakers, so when we went online with on demand courses, I was really disappointed. I had one Zoom class (not in EC) and it was better. I think Zoom is better because we can talk to our classmates and teachers. At least the speaking classed should be on Zoom.” (1st Year Student)

“I think online on-demand classes are fine, but for Listening and Seminar classes we should have some Zoom lessons so we can actually communicate with each other.” (1st Year Student)

“Even if we only do 30 minutes, we should have Zoom for online classes. Everyone should have at least a phone, so it should be fine. I want to take EC class at KGU with my friends. I want to improve my English more and more, so I can’t do that this semester. This EC stand for English Communication, but this semester we had only E, just English. No communication.” (2nd Year Student)

Despite this, very few students attended the Zoom office hours, which was their only chance this semester to interact in a synchronous manner with their instructors and fellow classmates.

For some, they did not do so because their academic performance did not warrant it, and they found enough support through their social networks:

“I didn’t really go to office hours because I was able to do everything else by myself.” (1st Year Student)

“I didn’t need to contact the teacher, my score was good, so I didn’t go to office hours. But my friends who were not doing well told me they don’t want to go to office hours because it is easier to ask friends in Line group.” (2nd Year Student)

For others, schedule conflicts did not permit them to join:

“I wish I could speak and listen to my teachers speaking to me, even if it was online. That was the thing that I missed this semester. However, I didn’t really go to office hours. Sometimes there were other (non-EC) classes that were on Zoom during my EC office hours, so I couldn’t really attend.” (1st Year Student)

Teachers were encouraged to hold office hours during their regularly scheduled lessons to avoid this type of conflicts, but anecdotal evidence suggests that some students chose to sign up for more hours at their part-time jobs, since they were not required to attend classes at that time and office hours were not mandatory.

“I worked a lot. Thanks to Corona virus, if I work more than 80 hours a month, I get a subsidy. Of course, I worked weekdays.” (2nd Year Student)

“Sometimes my part-time job schedule conflicted with my classes, but I couldn’t give up my part-time job.” (2nd Year Student)

Time management became difficult without a set schedule of synchronous classes that demand attendance, and many students simply lacked the discipline and motivation to attend first period morning office hours:

“In my opinion, because of Corona, everyone stay late at night and wake up really late, so if your Zoom office hour is early, they don’t come.” (2nd Year Student)

“When we are at home our priority is gaming and talking to friends. I am also addicted to YouTube. We understand we have to go office hours, but we didn’t motivated enough.” (2nd Year Student)

Other students indicated that they felt too shy to join an office hour and speak to an instructor many of them had never met before. Additionally, some seemed to lack confidence in their ability to communicate with their teachers, many of whom are native English speakers and might not be able to speak Japanese. It is also a policy of the school that instructors must always communicate with their students in English.

“I didn’t go to office hours because I am shy to talk to people I have never met before.” (1st Year Student)

“My friends especially say they don’t want to go to office hours because they have to speak to the teacher in English.” (1st Year Student)

“Us Japanese are very shy, though, and really worried about pronunciation. Many of my friends are too worried someone will laugh or look down them if they come to Zoom office hours and can't say correctly. We also worried about grammar, so we're afraid to write email to teachers because it won't be perfect. Also, writing on the discussion boards is really high level, so we didn't do anything.” (2nd Year Student)

“I didn't write questions for my teacher on the discussion boards because everyone could see my questions and that's embarrassing. I didn't know there were office hours, but I wouldn't go to them anyway. I wouldn't want to speak in English on Zoom.” (2nd Year Student)

Some students felt this mental block so strongly, that they did not join office hours even when they realized that they needed to communicate with their teacher:

“Writing was hard. We had to read the materials by ourselves and we had to understand the comments and feedback on Turnitin by ourselves, so this was really too much. We need more explanation from teachers. I was afraid to go to the office hours to ask for help. I didn't have the confidence to go there.” (2nd Year Student)

“I didn't go to office hours, even though my teacher told us to come. I thought it's better not to go. I don't really like Zoom because I don't want people to see my face. I hope we won't have Zoom lessons next semester.” (2nd Year Student)

While this asynchronous coursework context is likely the worst-case-scenario for social interaction in the classroom, this finding may also be important for synchronous video classrooms or even lecture hall courses. The classroom is a social environment; however, this aspect may be overlooked in curriculum development. For online coursework, there may be an increased need for discrete social planning within the academic curriculum.

Economic issues: Some students were directly impacted by economic hardships caused by the pandemic. Some parents lost their jobs and were unemployed for long periods of time, so several students felt that they were forced to take on more responsibilities to help out in their homes by working part-time. Because the lessons were on-demand and asynchronous, many students opted to work during the time that they would normally attend classes and study.

“My mother lost her job because of Corona, but she was able to find a new job. For about a month she was unemployed, though. We were able to make ends meet, though.” (2nd Year Student)

“It's just me and my mom, so I work more than other students here. This year I had to work even more.” (2nd Year Student)

“I know a lot of friends who went to part-time job during classes. They know they have homework, but they need to make money.” (2nd Year Student)

Socio-economic status has long been considered an important factor in the educational performance. During this pandemic, however, socio-economic flux became more salient than usual.

III. Academic Issues

Pedagogy: In terms of pedagogy, there were some aspects of the ERT experience that students appreciated. One of them was the use of videos by teachers, which allowed the students to better access the materials. Students could not only rewatch videos but slow the speed and add captions to increase accessibility.

“I wish my teachers made more mini-video lectures. It would have been helpful. I wish we had live, Zoom classes. However, I think the videos would be better because if I cannot understand, I can always go back and listen again or look at the captions.” (1st Year Student)

“I think using Zoom really depends on the class. For my media information class, the teacher uploaded videos, so there was no need.” (2nd Year Student)

On the other hand, there were experiences, especially for the seminar class, where the lack of the live aspect of the class limited their experience: they were not getting the experience of a live discussion in an asynchronous course. The course designers tried to mitigate this through the use of discussion boards and student-made recordings on the LMS. However, this was not sufficient, and many of the students felt that in those areas the pedagogy fell short. On the other hand, that same pedagogy, as this complex quote points out, was positive for the presentation class, because the self-recording method for the presentation class allowed students to put their best foot forward. In other words, whether the approach worked well or not was context specific.

“In Seminar class usually we can discuss something, but this time I had to record myself, so I don’t know if my English ability is [good] or not. I want to [do] Zoom class in seminar. But Presentation class is good: it is good for me to record and I can prepare for long time, so it is useful for me compared to face to face.” (2nd Year Student)

“I don’t want to use Zoom. I liked that my professor sent me PowerPoint for my architecture classes, so I can read again and again. Technical terms or very specific subject is easy to learn on my own, not in lecture. I can read in Luna, check hard words, then listen to teachers’ recording. I was able to many times come up with ideas and rearrange content very carefully. For writing classes, it was the best for me.” (1st Year Student)

“I liked my Special Topics class because it had video and I could understand what to do. Seminar was the hardest. It took longest time. Every day I have to record and think about the plot.” (2nd Year Student)

The pedagogical differences between ERT and face-to-face coursework are significant. The “emergency” nature of ERT is important to note as teachers are not necessarily trained in or experienced with online education. Some of the solutions to make the coursework more accessible were appreciated. Other aspects helped educators learn from mistakes to improve online education moving forward as the emergency continues.

Feedback: The area with the most negative feedback was feedback itself. In regular, face to face classes the teachers provide feedback which can be expounded upon, and students can ask questions during the next class. However, in the context of an asynchronous course, the

feedback was not sufficient for many of the students. This could be in part because the teachers were stressed, since they were also in the midst of the pandemic and many of the teachers were in higher risk groups than the students they were teaching. However, when the only interaction between student and teacher is the feedback they receive on assignments, it is much more important that the feedback be not only good, but also actionable.

“I just wish my teachers would give me more concrete comments that are easy to understand so I can know how to improve my reports.” (1st Year Student)

“Writing was rather difficult for me. I had to read the materials by myself, understand them by myself, write the essay, but when I got the comments back in English, it was really hard for me to understand. It is hard to know how to revise just with English language feedback.” (1st Year Student)

“Some of my teachers replied me soon, some of my teachers was not. Communication really depend on the teachers. My writing teacher only gave me one comment: ‘Too long, too long.’ How can I work with that?” (2nd Year Student)

“It was really difficult for me to improve. My teacher gave me less detailed advice, so I didn’t know what was wrong with my homework, or what was point of improvement of my works. This is the same as my writing. My writing teacher gave me less advice so I didn’t know what to do.” (2nd Year Student)

The way that different teachers chose to contact their students compounded the problem: some made use of the *Announcement* function in the LMS, which would post and email a notice to all students about their upcoming weekly tasks. Others chose to email these announcements. The difference was that by using the LMS function meant that the announcement was forever cemented on LUNA, making it easier to access, while an email might get lost in the sea of correspondence that seemed to have drastically increased for both students and teachers during the online semester.

“The biggest problem was some teachers were sending homework announcements in Oshirase,[the LUNA function], but some teachers were emailing the homework, so I was between fine and not.” (2nd Year Student)

The amount of feedback provided through passing interactions with students became more salient in its absence. Comments that students found sufficient were no longer sufficient when that passing interaction was removed. The facilitation of communication from teachers in a manner that is meaningful, actionable, specific, and timely is essential.

Implications

While course designers cannot address all the issues discussed in the previous section, it is possible to make curriculum and program-wide adjustments in terms of computer literacy, pedagogy, and feedback.

I. Computer Literacy & Pedagogy

From a department-wide survey it was learned that access to WiFi and devices was a not a problem for students. However, depending on the type of devices used (Mac or Windows, laptops or tablets), they would have different issues accessing and viewing content on the many platforms that the program uses. For example, certain devices would not open articles

or attachments to tests on LUNA the same way or at all, so now course designers know how to anticipate and prepare for these issues. The program uses many different platforms like XReading.com for extensive reading, Turnitin.com for writing, and many others, so there was quite a steep learning curve for new students as they had to learn to navigate all these platforms on their own, with screenshots or video tutorials from their teachers. Fortunately, the students adapted surprisingly well.

“I’ve mainly used my smartphone for Xreading, I used my PC for everything else. Turnitin and LUNA were easy to use. My teacher’s comments were easy to understand.” (1st Year Student)

“I didn’t really have major problems with technology. I have my own PC and I don’t share with anyone. LUNA was not easy to use at first, but I got used to it eventually, the more I had to use it.” (1st Year Student)

“I had no major tech issues. I checked Luna every day without problems. I could easily contact my teachers and coordinators by email. I used email for personal questions and the discussion boards for general questions related to the class.” (2nd Year Student)

“I had no problems with any of the online platforms, as I am a second year student and I have used them before. LUNA was a bit hard to use when I had to find out page numbers, but it worked out okay.” (2nd Year Student)

One thing that the course coordinators need to keep in mind, however, is to make full use of the *Due Date* function in the LMS. Students generally have as many as 14 to 18 courses in a semester, so even in a regular semester, they have quite a few deadlines to keep track of. The due date function in LUNA automatically sets up a calendar for the students with these deadlines, so they can easily be reminded of upcoming assignments. Unfortunately, many teachers were new to the LMS, so not all coordinators made use of this feature and many students were confused and missed deadlines. Also, the way that teachers send weekly announcements about upcoming lessons and assignments needs to be standardized across all courses, so that students know exactly where to find this information, instead of having to search for it through emails or on the LMS boards. Another issue was the introduction of Zoom for office hours: in the future, if these Zoom office hours will be carried over, they need to include incentives for attendance to improve efficacy.

When the program will eventually go back to regular face to face classes, a bring your own device (BYOD) policy will be implemented because this ERT experience has taught designers that materials can be made a lot more user-friendly, accessible, and attractive to students in a digital format as compared to the usual black and white printouts the department has been providing. This switch will also be better for the environment and for the school’s bottom-line, as less money will be spent on printing costs. The materials will also need to be designed from a student’s perspective: coordinators will need to conceptualize how the students will use these digital materials on their devices and anticipate any issues that

students might come across. Digital materials should also include a video archive providing lectures in video format for students to access.

Additionally, it was decided that the fewer programs are used, the better students and part-time teachers will be able to adapt. As this is a highly coordinated program, the aim should be to standardize and provide the same experience across all sections of the course, even though the lectures are delivered by different instructors. Therefore, the number of new applications and programs everyone needs to learn must be minimized to ensure a smooth delivery of the courses.

In terms of pedagogy, multimodality, or different ways to access the materials, is very important. This is a common theme in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and with ERT this became even more important than with a normal CALL lesson. For communication coursework, discussion boards were not sufficient to develop the communication skills the students needed. Moreover, optional materials were often either overlooked or ignored by students, because it meant that there was an additional amount of work that the students would have to do. Because course designers only had two weeks to organize the materials for an online format, the materials and the due dates were often at odds with each other, which caused some confusion. It is important that the lesson materials and the LMS have the same due dates.

Moving forward, designers also need to consider the function of online quizzes. It is good to divide between pedagogical quizzes, which allow multiple attempts and serve the purpose of learning and student feedback, and assessment-based quizzes, which are single timed attempts and evaluate students' progress.

II. Feedback

Feedback to students needs to be timely, specific, meaningful, and actionable. Because the majority of teachers in this program are part-timers, they have had to adapt not only to teaching online at this university, but at four or even seven other schools, each with their own system and standards. Unfortunately, this meant that there was a significant delay in communicating with students not only through email, but also in terms of scoring their assignments in a timely manner. As a result, students did not have a clear idea of how they were progressing until quite late in the semester. Many students complained that the feedback was not clear and they did not know how to use it to improve or make revisions. In a regular, face-to-face class, that student could have had the opportunity to interact with their teacher and ask questions, but not in an on-demand asynchronous environment where no one came to office hours. Therefore, more training with specific examples and instructions should be provided to teachers on how to give feedback.

The feedback from students to teachers was also problematic. Especially for 1st year students, many of whom had never written an email in English to their teacher, communication in this type of environment proved to be a huge obstacle. Some did not know where to begin, while others who did write would not provide enough information to help the teacher know how to locate them in the system. One teacher can have as many as 200 students in a week and many sections of the same course, so just signing off with a name and "I am in your Listening class" meant a lot of extra back and forth before the student could be located on LUNA and their issue addressed. Therefore, it would be a good idea to provide templates to students on how to write different kinds of emails to teachers with their orientation materials at the beginning of the academic year, as well as introduce a code of manners for communication, to avoid situations where the student contacts their teacher five minutes before a midnight deadline.

Limitations

Out of the 250 students enrolled in the Spring 2020 semester, 21 volunteered to participate in these interviews. As the interviewees theorized, it is possible that this sample is not representative of the entire student population:

“I think there are those of us who are really interested in learning and doing well in these classes, but there are also a lot of other people who are not interested as well. Like those of us who came to these interviews, we really want to learn.” (1st Year Student)

“Student who came to this Zoom interview, they want to improve their English skills, that’s why they joined, because they care and want to give you your opinion. But the people who didn’t come to this Zoom, they don’t care about EC. They just want to pass through quickly and don’t like to study.” (2nd Year Student)

According to surveys of the entire student population, the idea of switching to synchronous Zoom lessons for the second online semester was highly unpopular: roughly 71% of students surveyed indicated that they preferred the on-demand asynchronous style. This stands in sharp contrast with the students interviewed: just two out of twenty-one said they enjoyed and would like to continue with asynchronous on-demand lessons.

Conclusion

Making full use of the university’s LMS allowed students to continue their studies safely during the CoViD-19 pandemic. However, a fully online on-demand asynchronous format might not be the most suitable and efficient method for delivering the courses for this EC program. Courses like Seminar and Presentation do not lend themselves well to this type of format since discussion skills are crucial and live student interactions are necessary. The comments from the students interviewed as well as the overall student performance in the Spring semester of 2020 (in which a record number of students failed compared to previous years) seemed to indicate that students can benefit from a synchronous component. The lack of motivation and time management skills that students mentioned in the interviews can be counter-balanced by regularly scheduled, synchronous lessons where the materials can be explained by teachers and the actual classroom atmosphere can be somewhat recreated. In the subsequent semesters, the program has continued to be taught online: in the Fall of 2020 it followed a hybrid of on-demand asynchronous lessons and live, synchronous lessons delivered on Zoom, while in the Spring of 2021 there was a mix of face-to-face lessons combined with synchronous Zoom lessons. Overall student scores seemed to improve and there was less chance of failure when the synchronous format was introduced. However, this may also have been the result of students adjusting to the online system.

The introduction of online lessons has taught the course developers valuable lessons about curriculum design centered around an LMS. There are many aspects of the online experience that will be adopted even after the end of the pandemic to make the EAP program more efficient and interactive, as well as less costly and harmful to the environment. The department will adopt a BYOD policy for all students so that materials can be digitized and many of the assessments and homework assignments will be completed fully online. The

students' scores will now be available to students on the LMS, along with a calendar of assignment deadlines, so that students can manage their learning experience online and be aware of their progress throughout the semester. Japan has unfortunately fallen behind in the technological divide and even younger generations seem to be averse to using technology. Perhaps the most valuable lesson learned from this experience is that it is possible to bridge this divide and to introduce Japanese learners to technology in the classroom in a manner that harnesses technology to support their study of English as a foreign language.

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