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Student Evaluation of Flipgrid at a Japanese University: Embarrassment and Connection

ABSTRACT

The present study looked at student evaluations of Flipgrid, a video sharing platform. A total of 100 students gave their consent to take part in the study. Students were asked to make weekly videos between 60 and 90 seconds on various subjects, and then evaluate Flipgrid using an online survey. Student evaluations were coded, and interpreted in relation to the sub-constructs of transactional distance outlined by Zhang (2003). Results of the qualitative survey indicate – among others – positive feedback for mediation of social features (54,9%) and platform features (27,5%), but negative feedback for technical problems (39,2%) and feelings of embarrassment (30,4%). Despite feeling embarrassed, 61,7% of students agreed or strongly agreed that it was preferable to giving an in-class presentation.

Keywords: Flipgrid, online teaching, Transactional Distance, video

1. Introduction

The necessary for online teaching tools has been accelerated by the corona virus pandemic sweeping through the world at the time of writing. Online platform Zoom for example has seen a doubling of its valuation since its inception in April 2019 as educators turn to alternative ways to teach online and businesses close their physical doors (*The Guardian*, 2020). While only 24 per cent of established, prestigious universities are of the opinion that online teaching will become more popular than traditional onsite degrees in the future, factors such as the current pandemic, requests for social distancing, and self-restraint may increasingly compound the recent necessity for this trend (Timeshighereducation.com, 2020).

This invites the question of how to replicate the social dimension of learning promulgated by Wenger (2010) which postulates that learning takes place, not within the brain as a cognitive process, but within the relationship between the social self and the social world (as cit. in Blackmore, 2010, p. 180). In this sense, learning is a process of identification within a particular community of practice where the participant is “able (and allowed) to engage productively with others in the community” (p. 180). Seen from this perspective, it is important to examine

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how the online environment can mediate the social aspect of learning rather than merely focusing on output as measured by test scores and other means.

2. Literature review

Synchronous classes (taking place in real time) and asynchronous classes (taking place at the learner's own pace) both have advantages and disadvantages which should be considered during course design. For example, platforms such as Zoom – which allow for synchronous content delivery – have been met with complaints of *Zoom fatigue* (Patrick, 2020). Conversely, Cutrone (2009) draws attention to the weight placed on constant testing and getting the correct answer as a concomitant factor related to Japanese students' hesitance when required to speak in the L2 in a synchronous environment.

Shyness, the fear of making mistakes, and losing face have been shown to negatively affect performance when speaking in the L2 in a synchronous environment (Ariyanti, 2016, Hidayati, 2018, Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Sutarsyah, 2017). Elsewhere, Toland, Mills and Kohymama (2016) point to shyness as being a significant factor leading to anxiety when Japanese students are introduced to Western teaching methods in the traditional classroom.

The significance of considering how best to teach online is underscored when considering student satisfaction, and more specifically – attrition rates. Research suggests that drop-out rates for online learning can be between 40% (Burns, 2016) and 75% (Croxtton, 2014), with possible reasons for dissatisfaction cited as isolation and loneliness (Brown, 2001). Addressing this point to some degree, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) techniques have been shown to allow students to produce language that is qualitatively superior, expressive, and more coherent than language produced in traditional synchronous, face-to-face classes (Lamy & Hampel, 2007).

With regard to the use of video in language classrooms, Borup, West and Graham (2012, p. 195) noted that many students reported feeling that it made their instructors seem more real, present, and familiar; with several students noting that the relationships were not dissimilar to traditional face-to-face classrooms. A review of an extensive body of work by Magasic (2017, p. 200) found that the majority of the literature found that using video in the EFL classroom was appraised positively with regard to a) authentic language; b) verbal language features; c) paralinguistic features, and d) motivational appeal.

Flipgrid allows for students to produce asynchronous responses to a topic while alleviating the pressure of having to produce quick responses associated with synchronous classes. It has received favorable online reviews with Trustreview.com showing a score of 94% (TrustRadius, 2020). Hall and Buzwell (2013) (as cit. in Stoszkowski, 2018) noted that students who tended to be quiet in physical classes were more engaged in discussions when conducted on the platform.

The same paper also noted how students preferred watching their peers speak on the platform over “boring” written material (p. 3).

Jaramillo Cherrez (2019) found that the safe and judgment-free learning environment increased communicative performance and general willingness to communicate. Agan et al., (2020) found that 40% of students agreed that Flipgrid facilitated a more personal connection with their peers, with 50% strongly agreeing that it was more personal than a traditional discussion board. A further 60% reported gaining a better understanding of their classmates when compared with a traditional introduction discussion board.

With these points in mind, the goal of the present study is to investigate how the platform was appraised by students, and how these factors could be grouped together to produce broader themes.

3. Research questions and methodology

During Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), it was the researcher’s intention to ascertain how students felt about the online platform Flipgrid, and how it would be evaluated. In order to set the stage for students to do this, it was felt that it would be best to tackle the questions in as simple a manner as possible, thus:

- 1) What features of Flipgrid underpin student satisfaction?
- 2) What features of Flipgrid underpin student dissatisfaction?

4. Research design

Salient for online learning, is what Moore (1993) describes as transactional distance. This was ameliorated by Zhang to consider the online environment in what became Zhang’s Scale of Transactional Distance (TD) (Zhang, 2003). The main idea of this can be summed up as the degree of difficulty a student has in becoming actively involved with the learning environment. While various studies have attempted to quantify TD, it is generally accepted to be a psychological rather than a quantifiable distance which can be considered the same for each person. Hauser, Paul and Bradley (2012) found that a low TD translated into higher performance. Similarly, Deci and Ryan (2008) found that satisfaction and motivation to learn both increased in tandem with connectedness and reduced TD.

During construction of the survey, reference was made to Paul, Swart, Zhang, and MacLeod’s (2015) revised scale of transactional distance (RSTD). This reduced the 31 questions of Zhang’s (2003) original study down to 12 to be more succinct, parsimonious, and less time-consuming. The RSTD examines the student’s perception of learning and satisfaction as negatively correlated with what can be considered barriers to learning. Moore (1993) contended that this is most pronounced between student and teacher (TDST). Paul et al. (2015) however, found that the three most important sub-constructs of transactional distance affecting student satisfaction and perception of learning in order of significance were

Transactional Distance between the Student and Student (TDSS), Transactional Distance between the Student and Teacher (TDST), and Transactional Distance between the Student and Content (TDSC). Elsewhere, Kara (2020) found that the learner and the course interface had the largest influence on perceived learning, and perceived satisfaction was most significantly correlated with the interaction between student and teacher.

While accepting the excellent internal validity of Paul et al.'s (2015) study, it was felt that certain questions did not fit with the present study. For example, question 30, "It was easy for me to use the technology involved with this online class", and question 31, "The technology used in this course is difficult to learn and use" were considered to be repetitive. Elsewhere, question 27, "An efficient system is provided for students and instructor to exchange materials" was considered too wordy for L2 students and changed to, "Flipgrid is easy to use". And question 29, "I hate using the web" was considered tangential to the goal of the present study as the students had no choice under the circumstances.

5. Participants and implementation

Flipgrid was used in four speaking classrooms at Mukogawa Women's University from the semester running from May 2020 until late July 2020 (N = 100). After four sessions using Flipgrid, the students were invited to take part in a survey relating to their experience with the platform. The present study utilizes qualitative data in the form of a survey asking students to comment on what they liked and disliked in either English or Japanese. The second part of the survey utilized a Likert scale asking students to appraise seven questions related to Flipgrid in more detail.

Open responses in English and Japanese pertaining to the aspects of Flipgrid which students liked and disliked were coded into broader categories and counted to produce two charts. Using a content analysis in this way involved a degree of subjectivity. For example, "I am ashamed of talking to the camera", was considered to be similar enough in content to the comment, "to be looked my face by everyone" in constituting the category *embarrassment*. Elsewhere, certain responses were coded as falling into two categories. For example, "閲覧数が見えるところ" ([the fact that people] can see the number of views) was considered both an issue of technicality (the platform allows for this) and embarrassment (it could unintentionally result in comparisons of popularity).

6. Results and discussion

Strong support was shown for the question of whether Flipgrid aided students' speaking skills with 61,6% of respondents either agreeing or agreeing strongly. A similar 64,6% of respondents either agreed or agreed strongly that Flipgrid aided their listening skills (see figures 1 and 2) lending support for pedagogical mediation. This finding was further elucidated in comments such as, "You can

improve your speaking skills”, and, “My English skills are improved by it” (see appendices). In contrast to the comments focusing on improvement of speaking skills in the appendices, fewer comments pertained to listening skills, and more on exchanging opinions such as “自分とは違う意見が聞ける” (I can listen to opinions different to my own).

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Flipgrid helps me to improve my speaking skills.
99 responses

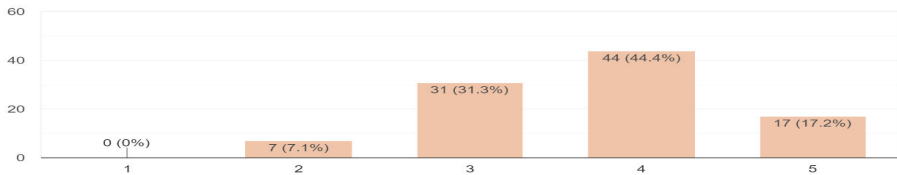


Figure 1: The extent to which students agree that Flipgrid improves their speaking skills.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Flipgrid helps me to improve my listening skills.
99 responses

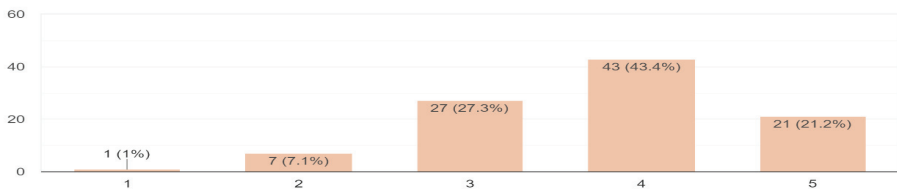


Figure 2: The extent to which students agree that Flipgrid improves their listening skills.

As can be seen below, 87,9% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that Flipgrid helped them to learn more about their classmates and teacher suggesting a low TDSS and TDST, (the lower the better). For example, students wrote that, “I can have a better sense of everyone”, “I can know about my classmates and teacher”, and, “I can learn unexpected side of classmate”.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Flipgrid helps me to learn more about my classmates and teacher.
99 responses

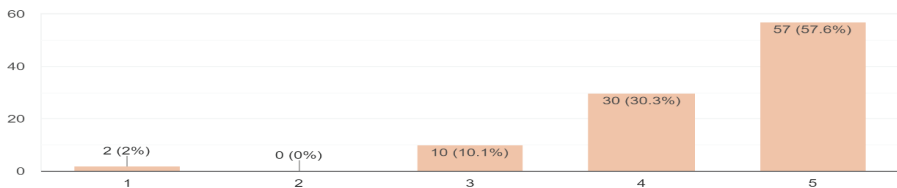


Figure 3: The extent to which students agree that Flipgrid helps them learn more about their classmates and teacher.

Figure 4 shows that 50,5% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that the platform met with their pre-course expectations. The fine brush information available in the appendices didn't cover the reasons for this, although this could be put down to a more general feeling that students weren't disappointed overall.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? I am satisfied with Flipgrid when compared with my expectations about learning online prior to the course.

99 responses

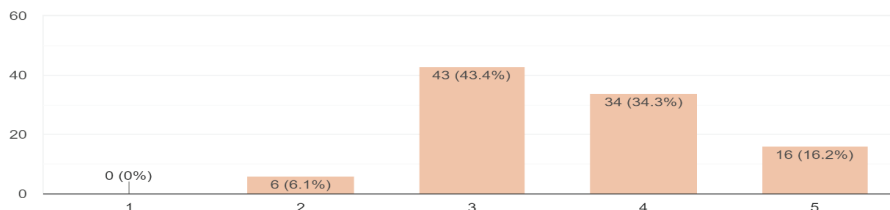


Figure 4: Comparison of students' expectations before starting the course and during the course

Figure 5 shows that 59,6% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that Flipgrid helped them to feel more connected with their classmates suggesting a low TDSS. Many comments such as, “みんなの顔が見れる” and, “人の顔が分かる” – (essentially meaning, “I can see everyone's face”). In fact, 24 out of the 50 comments coded as sociocultural related to words such as, “see”, “face”, “watch”, and “expression” suggesting that seeing each other's faces and expression was rated as important.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Flipgrid helps me to feel more connected with my classmates.

99 responses

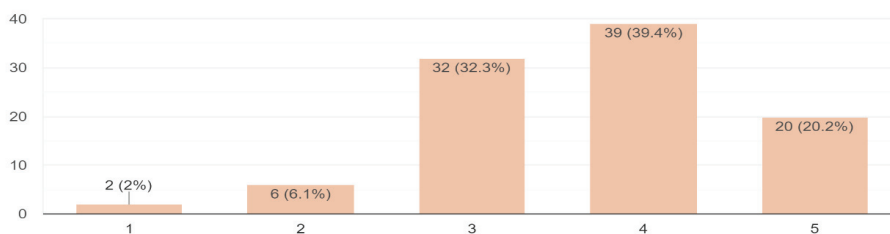


Figure 5: The extent to which Flipgrid helped students feel a sense of connection with each other.

Figure 6 shows that 56% of respondents found that the platform was easy to use, suggesting a low TDSI, with “I” representing the interface: Flipgrid. There was a total of 34 positive comments relating to technical features of Flipgrid such

as, “I could decorate the cover of my movie”, “It is easy to post on my video”, and, “I can take a video easy”.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Flipgrid is easy to use.
100 responses

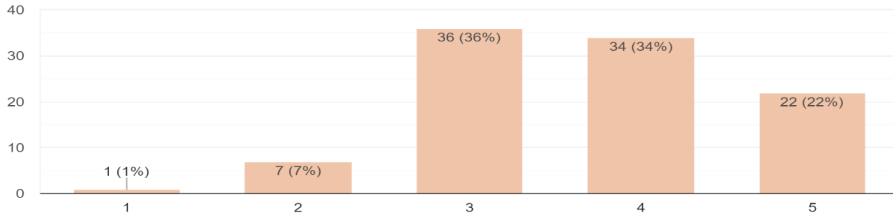


Figure 6: The extent to which students agree with the statement, “Flipgrid is easy to use”.

Figure 7 shows that 61,7% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they would prefer to show their Flipgrid video to other students than give a speech in classroom. This links with comments such as, “I have a lot of time to think my opinion about a theme”, and, “I can practice make a speech”.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? I would prefer to show my Flipgrid video online than give the same speech in front of the class.
99 responses

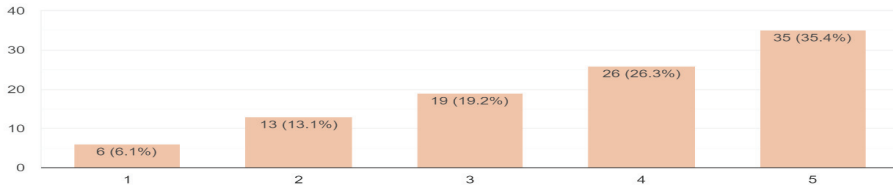


Figure 7: The extent to which students would prefer to use Flipgrid over giving an in-class presentation.

Ad research question 1) What features of Flipgrid underpin student satisfaction? – figure 8.

Social features: The most salient responses pertained to social aspects (54.9%) suggested by words such as “face”, “expression”, “smile”, “friends”, “sense”, “share”, and “know”. Typical responses in this category included, “I can know about new friends”, and, “I can have a better sense of everyone”. These findings contrast with responses pointing out the positive pedagogical aspects (15,4%) of the app, such as, “I can practice making a speech”, or “You can improve your speaking skills”.

Features that students liked about Flipgrid.

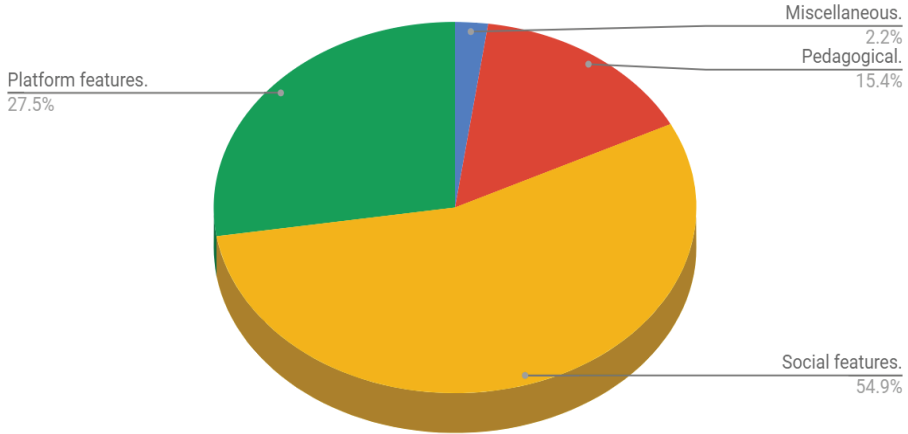


Figure 8: Research question 1) – result.

In the present study, 59,6% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that Flipgrid helped them to feel more “connected” with their classmates, 19,6 points higher than Agan et al.’s (2020) findings. Even more students (87,9%) either agreed or strongly agreed that Flipgrid helped them to “learn more” about their classmates and teacher, 27,9 points higher than Agan et al.’s (2020) findings. While the degree to which this latter finding was split between classmates and teacher was not available in the data, each participant’s video was approximately the same length as the teacher’s video. This suggests support for Flipgrid mediating a low TDSS and TDST.

Platform features: Research by Zhang (2003) suggests that Transactional Distance between Student and Interface (TDSI) is the least significant factor when considering the design of a course of study. In the present study, 27,5% of students liked technical features such as ease of use, being able to see all the videos in one place, and being able to decorate videos. This should however, be tempered by the finding that 39,2% of students experienced technical issues such as the time taken to upload videos, and the fact that making a video was “troublesome”.

Pedagogical features: Findings show that 15,4% of students made comments highlighting the fact that they could improve various English skills such as speaking, and being able to make a presentation suggesting a degree of satisfaction with the pedagogical mediation of the platform. Responses such as, “I can practice make a speech”, and, “I have a lot of time to think my opinion” were typical, although they

were far from being in the majority. Armstrong (2011, p. 222) noted that students' perceptions of online learning was less focused on academic rigor when compared with face-to-face classes.

Ad research question 2) What features of Flipgrid underpin student dissatisfaction? – figure 9.

Features that students disliked about Flipgrid.

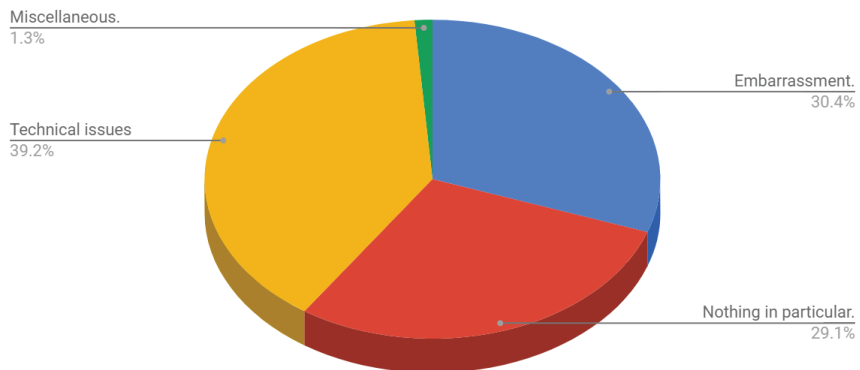


Figure 9: Research question 2) – result.

Technical issues: These were surprisingly common (39,2%), with the lack of a “face processing filter” (coded as both a *technical* and *embarrassment* category), and general problems with settings and uploading videos featuring among others. Despite this however, 29,1% of respondents indicated that they did not have any particular problems with the platform. The high percentage of technical issues suggests a high TDSI. However, this should be interpreted within the context of internet speeds in general, and general difficulty getting used to a new online platform.

Embarrassment: Embarrassment (30,4%) was one of the most commonly reported negative features, supporting Toland et al.'s (2016) finding that anxiety and embarrassment was the most common concern when sharing videos with classmates. However, 61,7% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they would prefer to show their Flipgrid video to other students than give a speech in class. This could be due to the reasons such as the high pressure atmosphere of synchronous classes (see Ariyanti, 2016; Hidayati, 2018; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Sutarsyah, 2017) and reasons outlined earlier. Many students made comments

such as, “I dislike that I can’t clean my face like a processing app” suggesting an anxiety about being physically judged by others. Indeed, a large body of research suggests that sites utilizing a photo and video sharing model can lead to anxiety about body image (Fardouly, Diedrichs & Vartanian, 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013).

Conclusion

Overall, Flipgrid received positive feedback from the students. The findings suggest that online course design should factor in social aspects such as the degree to which students can see and get a “sense” of each other. At the same time, this needs to be considered alongside student concerns regarding being seen by others; a double-edged sword so-to-speak.

While embarrassment was a salient aspect of the feedback, this should be considered against the pressure not to lose face in a synchronous learning environment. Indeed, anxiety and embarrassment have long been recognized as significant affective features of teaching Japanese students. Maftoon and Ziafar (2013, p. 75) cite shyness and expectations of highly guided behavior as influential factors affecting anxiety when speaking in the L2. It is important to note that the kind of embarrassment reported was not the kind of social reserve pointed out by authors such as Davies and Ikeno which can be explained in terms of cultural values (2002). Embarrassment manifested itself as more of an awareness of being watched by others and having one’s face seen by one’s peers; a general sense of self-consciousness.

It is perhaps unreasonable to expect factors such as embarrassment to disappear from the EFL classroom. Rather, the use of video in classroom could be considered a transition to in-class presentations, should the course require such skills. What is perhaps more salient, is mitigating the risk of social comparisons that can lead to concomitant feelings of depression (see for example, Nisar, Prabhakar, Llavarsan, & Baabdullah, 2019). In this way, the “like” feature was turned off when using Flipgrid due to the potential for social comparisons. Instructors should also be cautious of an emphasis on so-called face-cleaning apps in the use of student videos. These have been reported to create a false visual reality which sets up a dissonance between a person’s actual appearance and their processed appearance online (Leon, 2020). Future avenues for research may want to consider the use of avatars in presentations to further mitigate feelings of self-consciousness. While this approach may remove the focus away from comparisons of physical appearance however, it may also undermine the favorable social aspects such as seeing classmates as they really are highlighted in this study. Further research may be necessary in order to determine a degree of balance. Overall, Flipgrid proved to be a positive experience for the online classroom, and one that the author would recommend.

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Appendices

Content analysis

As broader patterns emerged, student comments were coded into the categories on the left. Pedagogical refers to any comments that were considered to pertain to skills such as the improvement and practice of speaking, listening, and pronunciation. Sociocultural comments were those which were related to connecting others in a social sense, such as being able to see other's faces, learn about others, make friends etc. Platform features/technical pertains to aspects of Flipgrid mentioned such as ease of use. Embarrassment was grounded in comments such e.g., as, "I'm not good at smiling in front of the camera" or, "恥ずかしい" [I feel embarrassed]. Finally, technical issues pertains to any problems students had when using the platform.

Table 1. What did students dislike about Flipgrid?

Unknown/other (2)	I like to make video. / move
Pedagogical (14)	You can improve your speaking skills. / 英語で自分が思っていることを話せること / I have a lot of time to think my opinion about a theme. / オンライン上でもみんなの意見を対面のように聞けること。 / 自分の英語を話す力を家でも向上させることができる。 / 英語力が上達し / スピーキング力を向上させることができる。 / I can practice make a speech. / I can be announced my opinion and idea in English. / We can speaking English. / My English skills are improved by it. / focusing on my pronunciation / 自分とは違う意見が聞ける / I can improve my conversation skill
Sociocultural (50)	I can see all classmate's presentation. / I like a friend's video. / I can watch friend's video. / I can watch classmate's video and know about them. 顔がみれるところ / I can see friend's speaking / I can see all classmate's presentation. / I can watch everyone's video. / 皆のエピソードとか皆の事について知れるところ / I can see everyone's video. / I can learn unexpected side of classmate. / 撮っている人の顔が見れる / I can listen to my friends opinion. / I can know everyone's life. / To introduce myself. / 友達や先生について沢山知ることが出来る。 / It's interesting because each person has their own personality. / 知らないクラスメートの事を知ることができる。 / It can listen to other people's opinions. / 動画なので話し手の表情などがよく分かる。 / I can know many things abot everyone. / Can see everyone's smile. / We can easily see the opinion of our classmates in the video. / I like to watch my friends video with Fripgrid. / そかの生徒の表情が見えるのが良い /

Table 1. continuation

	<p>I can watch everyone's video. / I can learn more about my classmates. / I can watch everyone's video. / I like to show me everyone video. / I can see the way my friends are. / I can know about new friends. /</p> <p>一気に多くの人の日常や家族構成などいろんなことについて知ることができる。 /</p> <p>クラスメイトのことについても知れるし、英語を話す機会が増えるところです。 / I can know about new classmates. / 一気に多くの人のことを知れたり。 / みんなの動画が見れるところ / I can have a better sense of everyone. / いろんな方のビデオを見ることができる。 / You can see the face of</p>
	<p>classmate. / I can see everyone's face. / I can know about my classmates and teacher. / みんなの顔が見れる。 / 人の顔がわかる /</p> <p>全員が話す機会を貰える / みんなの投稿が見れる / A place where we can listen to each other's stories and share I own stories that cannot be shared in class. /</p> <p>実際にみんなの話している姿を見ることができる。 / I can listen to my friend's story / 他の人のいろんな意見が知れる</p>
Platform features/technical (34)	<p>スタンプが豊富なところ。 / 動画を配信出来ること /</p> <p>簡単に動画をあげれるところ。 / I like that I can choose an image when posting a video. / 撮影が簡単 / どこでも、自分の意見を言えるところ /</p> <p>I like the point that I can choose the thumbnail. / 撮り直しができるところ /</p> <p>何人見たかがわかるところ / 動画をアプリ内で撮れるところ /</p> <p>簡単に使えるところ / 操作が簡単 /</p> <p>いつでも他の人の動画を見る方ができるところ。 / Flipgrid is the opportunity for me to speak English / 撮影方法が簡単 / Easy to use /</p> <p>何回も取り直しができるところ / 使いやすいところ / very easy to use /</p> <p>みんなとビデオを簡単に共有できるところ。 / I could decorate the cover of my movie / It is easy to post on my video. / I can take a video easy /</p> <p>使いやすいところです。 / It is easy to upload my video. /</p> <p>動画を加工できるところ。 / 他の人の動画を見ることができるところ。 /</p> <p>過去の動画も簡単に見れるところ。 / We can see everyone's video at first sight. / 他の人の回答動画が見れる所です。 / 動画であるところ /</p> <p>みんなで動画を共有できるところ /</p> <p>動画を手軽に撮って、アップロードできるところ / 言葉が伝わりやすいところ</p>

Table 2. What did students dislike about Flipgrid?

<p>Embarrassment (24)</p>	<p>I am ashamed of talking to the camera. / 顔が全体に公開されて恥ずかしい。 / I'm not good at smiling in front of the camera. / I hate it being seen by everyone as a video. / It's everyone can see my face. / I don't like my voice but class member listen to my voice. / 自分の顔が相手に見られること / I dislike that I can't clean my face like a processing app. / I dislike that I can't process my face. / to post my face / To show my room, and face. / I don't like the point that I should show my face to everyone. / I am little bit shy to taking a video. / 顔がうつることです。 / 自分の顔を見るのが嫌 / 少し恥ずかしさがある / To be looked my face by everyone. / embarrassed 自分の顔が反映されること。 / Have to show my face. / いろんな方に見られるので、少し恥ずかしい。 / 誰が見ているか分からないから恥ずかしい / It was a little embarrassing at first, but now I think it's a very good tool. / 顔を出すのが恥ずかしい。 顔が全体に公開されて恥ずかしい / 閲覧数が見えるところ</p>
<p>Nothing in particular (23)</p>	<p>特になし / ないです。 / Nothing. / ないです / 特にないです / Nothing / Not really. / Nothing / Nothing / 特になし。 / Nothing in particular. / 特にない / ありません! / Nothing / 特にないです / I have no idea. / ありません。 / There are no particular complaints. / I don't dislike it. / I don't know / nothing. / Noting. ないです。 / Especially nothing. / とくになし</p>
<p>Technical issues (31)</p>	<p>I dislike that I can't clean my face like a processing app. / 少し使いにくいところ。 / アップロードに時間がかかるところ。 / 閲覧数が見えるところ / I have to make a video. / It takes time to upload the video. / 編集をしにくいところ / taking more time than i had thought / Difficult to set / アプリがすぐに落ちる / 動画を作るときカメラが Flipgrid からしか使えない / 削除の仕方が分からないこと。 / 動画の時間が 1 分 30 秒までしかアップロードできないこと。 / 間違えたときに、最初から取り直しになるところ。 / Safari で開いてそこからアプリを起動させないといけない / I dislike that I can't process my face. / 自分で動画を撮らないといけないところ / 動画を追加する時の操作方法が分かりにくいところ。 / It is a little difficult how to use. / 撮影に手間がかかること / アプリに直接飛ばないところ。 / I have to take a video. / 設定の方法がわからない /</p>

Table 2. continuation

	<p>全体的に時間がかかるところ。 / I am worry about whether I make the video well. / 自撮りをしないといけないところ。 / The connection is bad when submitting or watching. /</p> <p>1 度投稿したビデオの自分の名前やタイトルの編集が出来ないところ。 / It is more troublesome to shoot a video than to write it in sentences. / It takes a long time to shoot videos. / It's difficult to take a video</p>
Unknown (1)	Taking movies.