

A Case Study of EFL Students' Motivation toward Online Exchange Programs

Junko Yamamoto

オンラインによる国際交流に対する EFL 大学生の意識調査

山 本 淳 子

Abstract

One of the alternative measures for students whose study abroad programs were canceled due to the global pandemic is the participation in online international exchange programs. I will look into the willingness of students to participate in such exchanges, as well as the motivation of those who have already participated. Based on interviews conducted with the participants, online international exchange seems to have the potential to motivate them to study harder. This is largely due to the learning environment of the students, their international posture, high level of willingness to communicate in a second language, and the intervention of the instructors. Although such programs cannot be a substitute for the study abroad experience, it is desirable to keep this option and further enhance this form of exchange in consideration for students who prefer the online style of exchange for various reasons.

Keywords: Online international exchange programs, motivation, qualitative analysis

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抄 録

新型コロナウイルスの世界的流行で留学できない学生に対する代替措置の一つとしてオンラインによる国際交流の活用があげられる。このような交流に対する学生の参加意欲と実際に参加した学生の参加動機や交流後の学習意欲などを調査する。参加者に対するインタビューの結果、オンライン国際交流は英語学習に対する動機づけに結びつく可能性があることが示唆された。これは学生の学ぶ環境、国際的志向性、WTC、担当教員の介入が大きく影響している。オンライン国際交流は留学体験にかなうものではないが、簡便性と費用面でこの形態による交流を希望する学生のために、継続することが望ましい。

キーワード: オンラインによる国際交流、動機づけ、質的調査

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In 2020, the spread of Covid-19 accelerated technological advances, as Vegas and Winthrop (2020) say, “forcing education innovation into the heart of almost every education system around the globe” (para. 15). In terms of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), face-to-face classes were once replaced by online language education. Schools, teachers, and students have had no choice but to adapt to a new style of online learning. Although the outbreak has subsided, some courses will continue to be taught online as of fall of 2021 in many universities across Japan (Japan University News, 2021).

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is one of the approaches of CALL, mainly referring to two types of communication: Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (ACMC)-such as email and SNS interaction-and Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (SCMC)-interaction through chat, Skype, and video conferencing systems such as Zoom and Google Meet. Although they have existed for decades, at no other time in history have we experienced such a surge in both forms.

From the perspective of second language acquisition (SLA) theory, an important element of CALL is interactivity (Chapelle, 2003; Hanson-Smith, 2009; Stockwell, 2013; Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). In this respect, CMC can be an indispensable tool to help English as a foreign language (EFL) learners gain communicative competence, especially in a time like this when direct communication is often difficult. This qualitative study focuses on students’ experience of CMC by looking at how they view online international exchange programs and examine if such form of communication can motivate English language learners.

Literature Review

CALL and CMC

The emergence of CALL has drastically changed the mode of teaching in many educational contexts (e.g., Garrett, 2009; Levy & Stockwell, 2006; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021), and it is expected to enhance the individualized and autonomous learning (Liu & Bu, 2016; Schwienhorst, 2011). Beatty (2010) explains eight CALL applications; Word processing, Games, Literature, Corpus linguistics, Computer-mediated communication (CMC), WWW resources, Adapting other materials for CALL, and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and mobile telephones. Among these, Beatty says “CMC is one of the more popular activities associated with CALL” (p. 69). Garrett (2009) also claims that CMC has gained popularity in recent years. Garrett explains, “... partly because of the steadily increasing influence of SLA theory focusing on sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics, and partly because of the massive rise in consumer communication technologies” (p. 723). Garrett refers to social computing as one form of CMC, and

explains it as one form of communication on the internet with people around the world. As interaction partners, Garrett suggests native speakers as CMC partners while Beatty includes peers with non-native proficiency language skills. As technology enables us to interact with English-speaking individuals all over the world, interaction partners should not be limited to native speakers. Therefore, this study refers to social computing as such.

CALL and Motivation

Al-Hoorie (2017) argues that although CALL research is flourishing, few studies overlap CALL and motivation research, and each is often studied independently. This study attempts to fill that gap by using motivation theory and concepts in my analysis. Previous studies have shown that the game elements provided by computers and applications are useful for enhancing motivation (e.g., Rachels, 2016; Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009; Warshcauer & Healey, 1998). The benefits of this type of CMC (social computing) have been recently reported (e.g., Blake, 2000; Konishi, 2021). However, as Al-Hoorie (2017) reported, ICT-related studies backed up by motivation theory are hard to find.

Fathali and Okada (2017) applied Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to their study. They implemented an interactive e-learning system to promote Out-of-Class Language Learning (OCLL) in e-learning environments. Japanese university students ($N = 164$) were encouraged to engage in OCLL through an e-portfolio that recorded their learning. The three psychological needs were satisfied. In particular, the need for a sense of competence had an impact on the promotion of OCLL.

Ferreira (2013) examined the effects of ICT-based cooperative learning on the English language learning of Japanese female university students ($n = 46$) in the light of the L2 (second language) Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (Dörnyei, 2005). In his study, third-year students ($n = 10$) produced a video podcast that was hyperlinked to the first year class' blogs, allowing the two classes to interact with each other. This activity facilitated the L2 learning experience, narrowed the gap between the ideal self and the current self, and enabled the students to explore their possible selves.

Wahaibi (2009) discussed what motivates Omani university students to engage in digital social spaces actively and how such engagement might potentially influence their language learning with reference to L2MSS as well as SDT. The study found that Omani participants' ideal selves were reinforced by their ought-to-selves. In fact, two are closely related, which was described as, "inextricably interwoven" (p. 86).

These theories all share the concept of self-perspective. Dörnyei (2005) explains how the self generates motivation based on self-discrepancy theory (Higgins 1987, 1996). He theorized that motivation is an individual's effort to bridge the gap between the current

L2 self and the ideal L2 self or ought-to L2 Self. The Ideal L2 Self can provide motivation for language learning as the student attempts to narrow the divide between his or her current perceived self and his or her ideal self in terms of language learning and proficiency. As it is expected that participants of this study may hold The Ideal L2 Self by interacting in English with their peers overseas, this CMC-related study will also look at students' motivation from a self-perspective.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

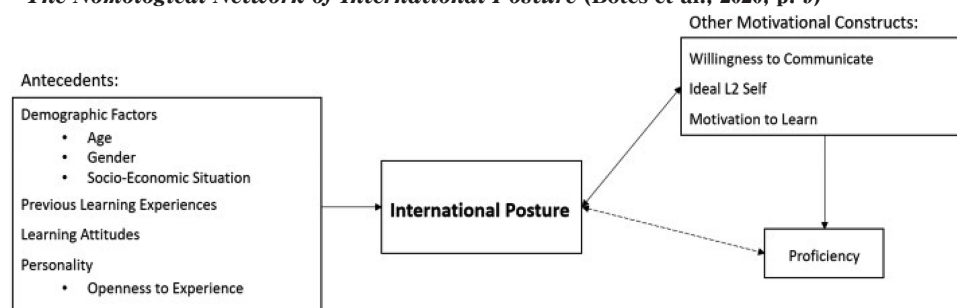
In second-language acquisition, Willingness to Communicate (WTC) refers to language learners' readiness to speak in the L2 at a particular moment with a specific person (MacIntyre, 2007). MacIntyre, et al. (1998) concluded that "it (WTC) represents the probability that a learner will use the language in authentic interaction with another individual, given the opportunity" (p. 558). L2 WTC was developed to explain that this is one of the key factors for communicative competence (Chapelle, 2003). However, in EFL situations like Japan, once you leave the classroom, the opportunity to use L2 does not automatically arise (Yashima, et al., 2004). Therefore, educators need conscious effort to provide such opportunities for Japanese EFL learners. Compton (2002) and Chapelle (2003) suggest the use of text chat to increase WTC. This study will look at WTC in CMC context and investigate the participants' views on online exchange programs.

International Posture (IP)

International posture (IP) proposed by Yashima (2009) refers to a global orientation that does not specify a target culture. Yashima (2009) describes IP as a motivator for Japanese university students when they view English as an internationally used language. In an increasingly globalized society, the idea that English should not be dominated by a particular native speaker, such as the US or UK became prevalent. In addition, IP's predictive relationship with WTC has been confirmed (Aubrey, 2010; Peng, 2015; Yashima et al. 2004). Figure 1 (Botes et al., 2020, p. 9) shows IP's predictive relationship with Ideal

Figure 1

The Nomological Network of International Posture (Botes et al., 2020, p. 9)



L2 self as well as WTC. Therefore, it is reasonable to include IP as a motivational variable in this research which is focused on motivation in CMC context.

Relying on the theories and concepts above, the author will analyze qualitatively how CMC with people in their same age group is related to language learning motivation.

Study Abroad and CALL

Before the outbreak of Covid-19, the role of CALL in study abroad programs had been mainly to help students have a smooth experience overseas, such as offering students online intensive listening practice and online interactive samples of demonstrations to fulfill their purpose for studying abroad (Garrett, 2009). The pandemic has added a new function. As study-abroad programs at universities are being canceled because of the pandemic, there is a growing trend to allow students to earn credits for "online study abroad programs" (Asahi-shinbun, 2021). Chunichi-Shimbun (2021) also introduced various online study-abroad programs and online cultural exchange programs at universities throughout Japan.

How do students who actually participated in such online programs feel about this type of CMC? How do they perceive the advantages and disadvantages of an online exchange? Do these programs help participants enhance language learning motivation? To the best of my knowledge few studies have investigated these points.

Background

At a women's university in Western Japan, which has an English language department for college and an English interdisciplinary studies for university, most study abroad programs and internships were canceled because of Covid-19 pandemic. Partly to compensate these canceled programs, two online video exchange programs were held during the 2020 school year. Table 1 gives an overview of the two programs.

The first program was called "Arab-Japan Youth Dialogues on Gender and Peace", which was organized by Arab Women Organization with support and partnership with the Embassy of Japan in Egypt and UN Women. The program was planned to enable young people from Japan and Arab countries to exchange opinions on "Gender and Peace" online (December 7th and February 8th). A faculty member who has connection with the United Nations suggested that her students participate in this program. A total of ten students agreed. To prepare students for two Zoom sessions, she gave them four 90-minute lessons (outside the regular class), i.e., two each before the two sessions. This program was not meant to replace a canceled study abroad program, but several students whose program was recently canceled participated.

Table 1
Online International Exchange Programs

Program Title	N	Country	Time and Procedure	Themes
Arab- Japan Youth Dialogues on Gender and Peace	10	Egypt (time difference: 7 hours)	2020.12/7 Live session (Zoom) 2 hours 2021. 2/8 Live session (Zoom) 2 hours Two 90-minute lecture and practice (outside of Prof. H's regular classes) before each session	First session: "The role of Youth in Combating Negative Stereotypes Against Women in the Society" Second session: "Youth as Champion of Change"
Online Cultural Exchange: O University (Japan) & B University (Palestine)	11	Palestine (time difference: 7 hours)	2021. 3/10 March Students post short (30 seconds -1 minute) self introduction videos on Flip Grid. 3/10-17 Groups discuss their topic video plans. 3/18 Live opening session (Zoom). Faculty to introduce the program and their respective universities, and participants to introduce themselves. 3/18-24 Students post topic videos on Flip Grid and comment on at least two other videos. 3/25 Live closing session (Zoom). Students to discuss what they learned and give any feedback.	Online Cultural Exchange, Focusing on introducing to each other the cultures and daily lives of their respective countries.

Note. Number of participants (N) refers to the number of participants from Japan.

The second program was offered in place of a canceled Taiwan-Japan online exchange program, which was planned to make up for the canceled study-abroad program to Taiwan. A faculty member who has a connection to a university in Palestine organized the exchange program for March 10-25. He first invited the students who initially planned to participate in the study-abroad program to Taiwan and then recruited other students primarily from his own classes. As a result, ten students participated. Students were divided into several pairs. Each pair was assigned a few specific topics (e.g., "How do you spend your free time?") and was asked to talk about these topics and exchange ideas using the platform(s) of their choice. This process lasted three weeks, and live Zoom sessions were held twice during this period.

Of all twenty-one participants, three students attended both programs. Neither program awarded credits to participants. Throughout this paper, the first program will be referred to as "Arab Youth Dialogue" (AY), and the second as "Palestine university program" (PU). Both of these exchanges were started in the school year of 2020, and similar online programs are already scheduled and being conducted in 2021 as credit-bearing school subjects. The content of future online programs may change depending on

the status of Covid-19 pandemic. My research interest is how we can motivate students to engage in such online programs actively and how these programs can influence their motivation to learn English. In order to learn specific information on individual views and beliefs that may lead to motivation or demotivation, qualitative research approaches were adopted. Moule et al. (2017) maintain, "Qualitative approaches facilitate the exploration of relationships and human experience within the research setting" (p. 197), and "The focus of the research is generally the views, experiences and perceptions of the participants" (p. 198). Through qualitative research, I expect to explore participants experience and views on online exchange programs. For this purpose, I propose the following two research questions:

Research Questions

1. What motivated participants to join the online exchange programs?
2. How do online international exchange programs affect the motivation of participants?

Methodology

Participants

With the help of the two faculty members in charge of the program, I interviewed four participants. First, in response to my request to contact interview program participants, Prof. H and Prof. T who each led the online programs sent e-mails to all participants to check if they were available for the interview. As a result, four students from AU and three from PU agreed. Among these seven, one participated in both programs, and two had graduated from university by the time of the interview in April 2021. Therefore a total of four students were interviewed. Table 2 shows the profiles of participants. Pseudonyms are used to protect individuals' anonymity. Among four, three (Asuka, Naomi, Saori) attend a class called Women's Global Leadership (WGL), which requires a certain level of English proficiency at the time of enrollment. This course offers

Table 2
Participants' Profiles

First Name	Year	Class	TOEIC (1)	TOEIC (2)	Program	Codes	References
Yasuko	2	Standard	345 (2020)	695 (2021)	PU	95	553
Asuka	3	WGL	650 (2019)	-	AY	115	481
Naomi	4	WGL	750 (2019)	835 (2021)	PU, AY	98	374
Saori	4	WGL	720 (2019)	815 (2021)	AY	73	299

Note. Yasuko's TOEIC (1): at the time of enrollment; TOEIC (1) of Asuka, Naomi, and Saori: Sept. 2019. Yasuko, Naomi, and Saori's TOEIC (2): Aug. 2021, after completing the online programs. WGL: Women's Global Leadership.

Table 3
A Question Guide

Question Themes	Details of Questions
Participant detail	Class, English learning history (strongest /weakest skills, etc.), TOEIC Scores
Reasons for participation	What (who) invited or motivated to participate, reasons for signing up
Overview of the program(s)	Memorable experiences, advantages and disadvantages of CMC, what (who) was helpful / not helpful
Changes as a result of participation	English skills, confidence, autonomy, motivation to study English
Reflection of the program(s)	Willingness to participate again, preference for availability of credit, any request to school on such English programs

a variety of options, including studying abroad for six months or one year. The programs that these three participants were planning on attending were all canceled. One student (Yasuko) attends a standard class, and she was not planning any study abroad at the time of the online program and the interview.

Procedures

The author conducted interviews with these four students individually in April of 2021. As a data collection method, semi-structured interviews were adopted. A question guide (Table 3) was prepared in advance to guide the answers to the research questions. A semi-structured interview was employed to allow a wider scope for participants to highlight their experience and to access more qualitative data (Moule et al., 2017).

The average interview time was 43 minutes, and interview data was recorded and transcribed in English. After receiving an explanation regarding the study's purpose and procedures, all four participants completed an informed consent form. Moreover, the author followed the university's ethical guidelines for research.

Transcribed data was analyzed qualitatively using NVivo 12 (released in March 2020), a qualitative analysis software. Each interview data was first coded line by line. Then, common themes relevant to the research questions were identified.

Results

Classification of the codes was conducted in line with my research questions. The codes were first divided into two main themes. Those that were considered to be related to motivation were termed MOTIVATORS and those related to attrition of motivation were termed DEMOTIVATORS. Table 4 shows the Thematic Framework of this study.

As the participants were generally motivated to participate and all expressed many more positive thoughts than negative ones, there was a large difference between

Table 4
Thematic Framework

	Name	Files	References
MOTIVATORS (Files 4, References 233)	<i>PERSONAL</i>	4	193
	1. Motive for Participation	4	92
	Invitation from Teachers	3	5
	Willingness to Communicate (WTC)	4	32
	International Posture (IP)	4	55
	Hope for studying abroad	3	17
	Influence of int. students	4	8
	Interest in foreign countries	4	9
	Interest in various types of English	3	6
	2. Positive Experience	4	101
	New Insights	4	32
	Inspiration from Dialogue Partners	4	20
	Interest in Next Online Project	3	12
	Confidence	3	30
	Autonomy	4	7
	<i>INTERPERSONAL</i>	4	26
	1. Support from Instructors	4	9
	2. Friendship with Online Partners	2	11
	3. Cooperation among Participants	2	6
	<i>EXTERNAL</i>	4	14
DEMOTIVATORS (Files 4, References 30)	<i>PERSONAL</i>	2	3
	<i>INTERPERSONAL</i>	4	17
	<i>EXTERNAL</i>	2	10

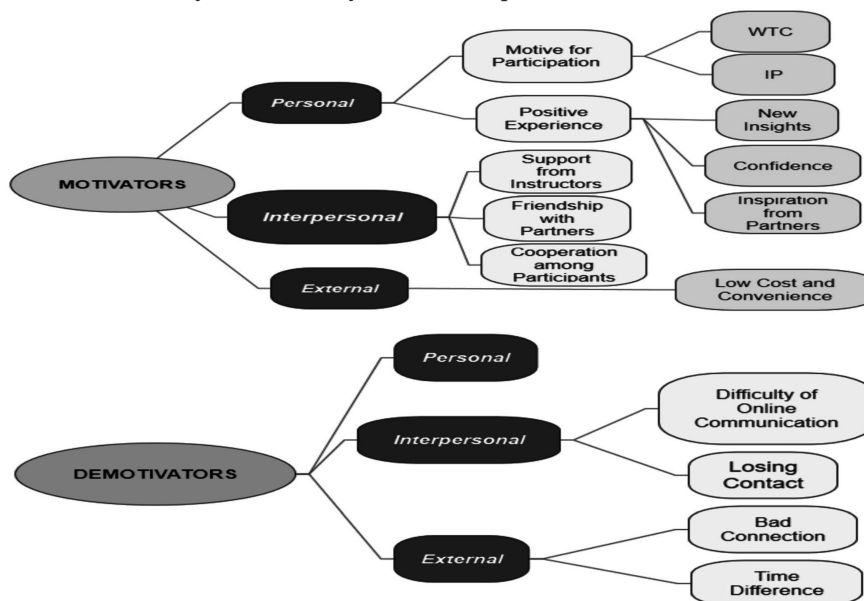
*The number in Files means how many participants discussed the theme, and the number in References mean how many times the reference was discussed in each theme or sub theme. Figure 2 is a thematic model of motivation of participants, considered through the lens of the motivational framework.

the number of MOTIVATORS (233 references) and the number of DEMOTIVATORS (30 references). Then, under each broad theme, three specific subthemes were labeled: Personal, Interpersonal, and External. L2MSS (L2 Motivation Self System) and SDT (Self Determination Theory), as well as WTC (Willingness to Communicate) and IP (International Posture) were used to classify and interpret the relationships between references and motivation. As Table 4 indicates, common themes relevant to the research questions were extracted. Consequently, motivation-related codes became the central themes in the thematic framework of this analysis.

Motivators: Personal Factors

Personal factors were divided into two categories: **1. Motive for Participation**, and **2. Positive Experience**. These categories have their own subcategories, which are explained below.

Figure 2
Thematic Model of Motivation of CMC Participants



1. Motive for Participation

This category features four subcategories: **Invitation from Teachers**, **Willingness to Communicate** (WTC), and **International Posture** (IP). These are the factors that led participants to sign up for the online projects. Students' experiences of being invited to the program(s) by the teacher were generally positive. One student stated that it was hard to decline the invitation from the teacher.

As for **WTC**, interviews clearly showed that four participants had high WTC, which they had acquired through interactions in their university lives. The following extract suggests Asuka has a strong will to practice speaking with an eye on the future.

I think there will be more opportunities to work online in the future. I think it's increasing now, but I think it will probably be even more advanced when I start working, so I'd like to practice now so that I can speak smoothly with people overseas when I do. (Asuka, 3rd year)

The next extract shows Naomi's attitude of speaking in English with classmates.

I often practice speaking English with my classmates. We used to do things like, "Let's talk in English today." (Naomi, 4th year)

Usually, as discussed in the literature review, once you leave the classroom, the opportunity to use L2 does not automatically happen. This kind of attitude of consciously increasing the opportunities to speak English seem to have led to the participation in online projects, in her case, twice.

The following extract expresses this student's strong desire to speak that she has since her freshman year.

I wanted to talk to the teachers as much as possible when I was a freshman, but I stumbled a lot, so before this program started, I decided to work hard on my English practicing speaking as often as I can. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

I don't enjoy talking to Siri. It's fun sometimes, though. I want a real person on the other end of the line. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

For this student, who was not planning to study abroad, online exchange program was an ideal opportunity to test what she learned through her daily practice.

International mindset and behaviors—including visiting foreign countries, interacting with people of different cultures, and getting involved in any international activities or situations—are included under **IP**. A solid level of IP was observed among participants, which is likely influenced by the learning environment of the university—including the number of international students from diverse countries (China, Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, Nepal, Bhutan, the Philippines, etc.) and access to worldwide study-abroad programs, internships, and courses. These opportunities are open to all students regardless of year, although they must achieve a certain TOEIC score to participate.

IP was mentioned fifty-five times, and it is further categorized into four topics: "Interest in Various Types of English", "Interest in Foreign Countries and Cultures", "Influence of International Students at University", and "Hope for Studying Abroad". The following extract shows her IP.

Many of my good friends here are international students. (Yasuko, 2nd year)
(“Influence of International Students at University”)

This student's class does not have as many international students as WGL classes. Her attitude of trying to make international friends outside of class is an indication of IP. The following extract explains how this student describes her international friends as role models.

One of the international students in our group is very talkative, so I get influenced by her so I try and talk like her. (Saori, 4th year) (“Influence of International Students at University”)

Next is one of the several extracts from three participants who expressed their interest in various types of English.

In fact, there are not that many people who can speak like native speakers, right? I thought it would be great to listen to people who don't speak English as their first language, so that we can learn from each other. (Asuka, 3rd year) (“Interest in Various Types of English”)

As this extract shows, participants do not care if their partners are native or non-

native speakers of English and are interested in learning various types of English. The next extract shows Naomi's long-term desire to study abroad.

I was in junior high school when I took the TOEFL for the first time, and ever since then, I had been aiming to study abroad. (Naomi, 4th year) ("Hope for Studying Abroad")

As studying abroad was supposed to be the highlight of her university life, she was quite disappointed when it was canceled. The fact that she signed up for two online programs to make up for the opportunity is a testament to her high IP.

2. Positive Experience

This consists of five subcategories: **New Insights**, **Interest in Next Online Project**, **Inspiration from Dialogue Partners**, **Confidence** as a result of participation, and **Autonomy**.

New Insights refers to participants' newly acquired knowledge in terms of content, culture, and language. Acquiring new knowledge and understanding international issues are challenging yet rewarding for participants and will lead to building self-confidence. **Interest in Next Online Project** means their willingness to participate again if such an opportunity should arise. **Inspiration from Dialogue Partners** shows how participants were impressed and inspired by their dialogue partners' proactive attitudes toward expressing opinions. **Confidence** refers to statements that demonstrate participants' positive attitudes and confidence gained as a result of participation. **Autonomy** concerns participants' autonomous attitudes they acquired after the program(s).

In the following extract from **Inspiration from Dialogue Partners**, participants discuss the differences in attitudes between dialogue partners and Japanese speakers.

It's not that they have a lot of vocabulary. Even if they do not know the exact word, they still speak very confidently as if to say their English is perfect. When I saw how confidently they were speaking, I thought I needed to be more confident as well. (Asuka, 3rd year)

She compared her "actual" self to dialogue partners and identified her ideal self in engaging in an online exchange, which then led to her motivation to communicate more positively.

The next extract shows Yasuko's impressions toward dialogue partners and reflects on the passive attitudes of Japanese people, including herself.

Dialogue partners say whatever and whenever they want to say very spontaneously, but Japanese people would say, "Oh, yes?" only after being prompted to speak. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

This extract implies that she and other Japanese should follow the example of their

partners, who were more assertive. Generally speaking, interview data revealed that having conversations with peers who speak more actively and fluently inspired the four participants, leading them to have a clearer image of their Ideal L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2009), which eventually provided motivation for language learning as they try to narrow the gap between their current perceived self and ideal self.

The next extract is about **Confidence** as a result of participation.

The session was not formal, but there was a proper atmosphere, especially in the first session. I was very nervous to speak in such a situation, but somehow, I managed to speak because I prepared well. (Naomi, 4th year)

From this extract, it became clear that she was able to speak in a proper setting in the face of her nervousness, which gave her confidence.

*The program gave me confidence in speaking English. [Why do you think so?]
When I saw how confidently they were speaking, I thought I needed to be more confident as well.* (Asuka, 3rd year)

This example shows how the confidence exuded by Arab participants had a positive influence on her.

I'm more confident now. So I've been communicating in English on Instagram with a girl I met through this program. I've also created two Twitter accounts in English. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

This participant's confidence seems to have led to her positive attitude to use English.

The following extracts are about **Autonomy**.

Before I joined this program, I was the type of person who didn't really participate in school events. But after participating in this event, I started to think that I would like to get more involved with people and take part in some projects or support new students. (Asuka, 3rd year)

It is evident that she was trying to change her current self by imagining her positive ideal self. This attitude is also reflected in her English learning.

As for English, I didn't have many opportunities to practice speaking during spring break, but I started doing things like looking at social media posts about social issues written in English, or watching international news on YouTube. (Asuka, 3rd year)

The Next extract shows Yasuko's renewed resolve to talk to her teachers in English.

After this program, I started to talk to teachers more proactively by asking, "Excuse me, sir," and the like. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

The following extract is from a student who told me she did not gain any confidence as a result of participation. However, she stressed that her attitude has changed, and became more autonomous in communication.

My attitude toward English has changed after participating this program. Even when I'm not interested in the topic, I wouldn't just say, "This has nothing to do with my field." As long as I participate in the discussion, I have to say something, no matter how stupid I may sound. (Saori, 4th year)

Her learner autonomy is shown clearly. It is hoped that her autonomous attitude can lead to her confidence and vice versa.

Motivators: Interpersonal Factors

Interpersonal factors were divided into three categories: **1. Support from Instructors**, **2. Friendship with Online Partners**, and **3. Cooperation among Participants**.

1. Support from Instructors

Interview data in this study revealed the impact of perceived relatedness. Connectedness was felt more strongly with teachers than with other participants. The following three extracts are examples of teacher-student relationships that led to the success of the project.

The teacher was very supportive, and we would get together several times before the actual program, and she would give us assignments so that we can get well prepared for the dialogue. This assignment made me really think and organize my thought. Then we would send the assignment to the teacher, and she edited them all, and we practiced saying them. (Asuka, 3rd year)

She taught me a lot of things, and every time I said something, she would send me messages like, "You are on the right track!" and she really pushed me to speak. (Saori, 4th year)

He kindly set up this exchange program after the online program with Taiwan students was canceled. Our teacher and Palestine teacher helped us a lot. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

Schwienhorst (2011) stresses the importance of teacher's role in CMC. "The teacher has the responsibility to create a task framework or a learning environment that lies within the reach of the learner's level of autonomy" (p. 13). At the same time, these extracts also indicate the dependence of the students on instructors. Teaching is done outside of class hours, and instructors are involved in these programs on their own time.

2. Friendship with Online Partners

The following two students developed friendships with their dialogue partners.

I'm still connected with them on Instagram, and we still exchange direct mails and

the like. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

The highlight of BU project is that I have made friends. I contact with girls around my age through social media. (Naomi, 4th year)

These extracts indicate that nurturing good friendships is possible even through online interaction (As of September 2021, they reported that they still keep in touch).

3. Cooperation among Participants (both Japanese and international students on Japan side)

Two students mentioned supportive relationship with other participants.

When I saw that everyone was trying their best to talk online, I was influenced to talk too. On the screen, some students encouraged me and told me, "You were so great!" (Asuka, 3rd year)

I felt like we were working hard together. I also had a chance to call the people who participated in the program to share our impressions of the program. (Naomi, 4th year)

Motivators: External Factors

Participants expressed that the main advantages of online exchanges were convenience and little to no cost, the factor that will motivate many other students who are not planning on going abroad or those who cannot afford the cost. The next extract shows the financial merit of online communication.

The cost of studying abroad is huge, isn't it? But if you're online, you don't have to pay anything, and if you live with your family, Wi-Fi costs will be paid by your parents. It's virtually free for me. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

Leaving this kind of online interaction as an option seems desirable for students who, for financial reasons, wish to have this kind of online interaction.

In terms of convenience, the ease of communicating with people around the world was mentioned.

Normally we would not choose the Arab world as a destination. It's too far away, isn't it? If it's online, we can talk to people who live far away very easily. (Asuka, 3rd year)

There were also remarks on the convenience that technological innovation brings.

We can conveniently talk face-to-face via Zoom or something and cost is zero. (Naomi, 4th year)

Online communication is so flexible. We can communicate either from home or from school. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

The advantage of being able to simulate the experience of studying abroad while in

Japan is considered a considerable motivator. It became clear that Personal, Interpersonal, and External factors have contributed to enhancing their motivation to participate in online exchange programs proactively.

As another possible external reason to participate, the author asked if credits were a motivator or not. Three of them said they do not care about credits, which is not surprising since students participated in the program(s) knowing that they will not receive credit. However, one participant strongly stated that receiving credits would be an incentive to actively engage in such projects.

In this study, key motivating factors supposedly leading to their participation were WTC and IP. These two elements might have interacted with each other and motivated people to participate in the program. New insights as well as inspiration from dialogue partners, autonomous attitude they gained can be linked to motivation. Support from instructors turned out to be more influential for four participants than that from fellow participants.

Demotivators

As I have mentioned above, remarks that can be linked to demotivation were not so many. There are three themes, PERSONAL, INTERPERSONAL, and EXTERNAL. No subthemes were generated. Let me explore what can be deduced from the few DEMOTIVATORS.

Demotivators: Personal

Two participants explained that they would not be able to fully understand people, including their culture and environment, without visiting the place in question. The following extract shows that what she really wants to do is face-to-face communication in foreign countries.

The culture is different, the way of speaking English and the accent are different. I would have been able to speak more clearly if we had actually met and talked.
(Naomi, 4th year)

The next participant had a strong desire to study abroad. Her frustration of online communication was conveyed.

I mentioned earlier that online exchange would save me a lot of effort and money, but I want to spend a lot of effort and money to go there and learn many things, like, why this person thinks this way? It may be hard to tell just by being in that country, but I think we can't understand someone's way of thinking fully without visiting the place they live. A person's thoughts are made up of many things, and the place where they grow up is one of the clues to understand that person. You

can learn about their culture as well. (Saori, 4th year)

For those who want to study abroad, there is no substitute for the joy of actually going to a foreign country and learning there. Saori expressed that she is willing to spend the money, time, and energy to do so.

Demotivators: Interpersonal Factors

All participants mentioned the difficulty of reading the atmosphere of a place or situation. They felt that they could not communicate smoothly partly because they could not see people's subtle facial expressions, body movements, or gestures. One student complained about this point.

You have to be very careful when you want to interrupt. You need to read a sense of atmosphere between you and your partners, right? (Asuka, 3rd year)

The same participant mentioned the difficulty of requesting to speak slowly.

If you don't mute yourself, it will bother other participants, and if you ask in chat, you don't know if that person is watching. (Asuka, 3rd year)

One student experienced losing contact with her partner during an exchange using a flipgrid (i.e., a tool that allows users to post topics that are essentially videos with accompanying text).

We worked in pairs, but unfortunately, my partner didn't show up, and I sent her an e-mail, but it didn't seem to reach her. I asked about her through the teacher of B university, but I haven't heard from her since. (Yasuko, 2nd year)

While it is easy to join the online conversation, it is also easy to leave. Both sides need to understand the significance of the exchange programs and to be responsible not to cause trouble to each other.

Demotivators: External Factors

This category of demotivators addresses typical issues we all face during online communication, including connection instability and time zones.

If there's a break in the middle of the conversation, I will lose my concentration in listening to them. (Asuka, 3rd year)

I asked her, "What did you do today?", then she said, "It's still morning." I said, "Oh, I see, I see." (Yasuko, 2nd year)

Connection instability can be addressed and hopefully improved with the development of technology. The problem of time difference may not be solved, but students can adjust to it, overtime.

For this category, negative or critical statements were hardly observed. Most issues can be solved with effort. However, as comments in "Personal Factors" show, online

programs may not be able to provide comparable experience of actually going abroad.

Discussion

This section addresses the following research questions: 1 “What motivated participants to join the online exchange programs?” and, 2 “How do online international exchange programs affect the motivation of participants?” As for research question, 1, the two largest influences that prompted the participants to join the programs were WTC (Willingness to Communicate), and IP (International Posture). They started acquiring WTC and IP in their childhood (one student is a returnee from the United States and the Netherlands). These were considered to foster a positive and autonomous attitude to sign up and participate actively. Interviews revealed that taking English classes and interacting with teachers and friends in English had a big impact on their WTC. As for IP, students’ interest in various types of English, interest in foreign countries and their cultures, friendly rivalry with international students at university had a significant influence. The factor of hope for studying abroad was another crucial reason for three students to join the program(s). These two elements might have reinforced each other, leading to the motivation to participate in the program.

Regarding research question 2, participants generally enjoyed the online exchanges and had positive experiences, and consequently became more motivated to continue learning English. Positive experience includes communicating with L2 speakers, getting new insights, gaining confidence, and receiving inspiration from their conversation partners overseas. The positive experience of communication in the L2 is identified to improve perceived competence and self-confidence (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003; Chen, 2017). In light of SDT (Self Determination Theory), a positive experience will lead to meeting the need of perceived competency, the psychological need proposed by SDT. In terms of L2 MSS (L2 Motivation Self System), active interaction facilitated the L2 learning experience and allowed the students to explore their possible selves (Dörnyei, 2009) by narrowing the gap between their ideal selves and their current selves (Dörnyei, 2009) as they interacted with more fluent and proactive interaction partners.

Participants stated that they appreciated the convenience, cost-effectiveness, and other advantages of online programs. Especially for those who want to interact with people of different nationalities around the world but cannot afford the cost, these are the ideal opportunities. Also, one of the by-products of studying abroad is the development of friendships, and it turns out that this is possible online as well, although only two participants reported such friendships. Cooperation among participants was also mentioned by only two participants. About these interpersonal factors, further research

with a larger number of participants would be necessary to confirm the effects.

Demotivating factors were also observed. Negative personal feelings about SCMC (Synchronous Computer Mediated Communication) and interpersonal problems caused by online communication were expressed. As with any online interaction, some factors can affect motivation, such as connection problems, time zone differences, and difficulty in communication. However, as technological innovation progresses, connection problems can be improved. Also, as I stated earlier, students can hopefully adjust to time difference problem eventually.

Generally speaking, the three psychological needs proposed by SDT, meaning the need for autonomy, competency, and relatedness, have been met for participants in the online exchange programs: newly acquired knowledge and confidence they gained as a result of the program(s) will meet the need for competency. Relationships with their teachers and fellow participants and friendships they developed with their dialogue partners will all contribute to meeting the need for relatedness. Their attitudes to keep on studying after the project reflect their autonomy as a result of participation. As far as the four participants in this study are concerned, online exchange programs held in 2020 seem to have been effective in enhancing their motivation to study English. Instructors' support turned out to be instrumental in motivating participants. However, in order to reduce the burden on teachers and get more students to participate, it may be desirable to make online programs credit-awarding courses.

In terms of growth of English skills, although nothing definitive can be said as so many other factors are involved, there is a possibility that improvement of three participants' TOEIC scores (one has not taken the test since 2019) can be ascribed to the participation in the program(s). It can be assumed that the online programs contributed to participants' motivation to study autonomously, which eventually led to an increase in their TOEIC scores.

For students who wish to study abroad, it became clear that short-term online programs are not satisfactory. Restoring real study-abroad programs should be a top priority for those who need them. At the same time, online exchange programs have been shown to be effective at motivating participants in this study. The ease of communicating with people around the world and cost effectiveness were expressed by participants, providing a rationale for keeping online exchange programs as an option.

Conclusion

Online international exchange programs can partly compensate for the experience of study-abroad programs and can offer positive experiences that will benefit students

regardless of the plan to study abroad. It became clear that interviewees' high levels of WTC and IP that they acquired in and out of university led them to participate in the program(s) and that they became motivated to study after having a positive experience. From an educational point of view, schools need to develop curriculum to enhance IP and WTC. Regular international exchanges can be a perfect opportunity to nurture these, which can be realized more easily online.

While this qualitative analysis has helped us uncover participants' perspectives, it is limited in that there were only four participants. Online international exchanges can have a variety of impact on different students. Also, the author did not compare the interview results with the ones involving less motivated students. Such comparisons could further clarify how we can use CMC or SCMC more effectively in the future for EFL learners with varying levels of motivation.

As technology develops, our knowledge of ICT-based exchange programs with foreign countries will continue to grow. In future work, I would like to explore how CMC-mediated international exchanges can increase students' motivation and English ability in greater depth with a larger number of participants.

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