



To Zoom or not to Zoom: Japanese and Ukrainian students' attitudes towards online language learning

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Abstract. This paper reports on research that aimed to provide initial insight into how university students in two different countries, Japan and Ukraine, coped with greater use of videoconferencing software and whether this resulted in any issues surrounding their online privacy. To facilitate learning under the COVID-19 pandemic, instructors and learners had to speedily adapt to a 'new normal' of intense videoconferencing online learning. However, did this rapid implementation of online learning negatively impact students' privacy? The findings presented in this reflective paper suggest that despite initial concerns, students who participated in the research exhibited low-level concerns regarding the impact of videoconferencing software on their online privacy. Although, students' privacy concerns did grow when presented with long-term or permanent use of online learning as an integral part of a language learning structure.

Keywords: privacy, videoconferencing, online learning, COVID.

1. Introduction

Like almost every educational institution around the world, the universities in Japan and Ukraine where the authors taught had to rapidly adjust to the restrictions imposed by an unprecedented global pandemic. The immediate impact of the coronavirus on language learning was that face-to-face interaction between learners and educators became no longer viable (Schleicher, 2020). The response to classes migrating to an online format was necessary to reduce the potential spread of COVID (Sahu, 2020). Yet, issues relating to student welfare, and in particular their

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privacy, were not afforded the amount of time that such a monumental alteration to a learning process would normally require.

The technology adopted for these online learning courses was dominated by two videoconferencing software platforms, Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Both offered similar online software capability – namely the ability to interact in real time with class members in different locations via live-stream video (Clopper, Baccei, & Sel, 2020). The university in Japan allowed individual educators to select the technology they felt best served their requirements. In this regard, the author based in Japan chose Zoom as it offered the ability to show all participants' video screens simultaneously. Teams, initially at least, limited the number of participants' video screens that were displayed concurrently. Unlike in Japan, the university in Ukraine adopted Teams as the compulsory platform for all educators and students. Both programmes were free of cost for the students to use.

2. Method

The study was based around English language learning courses at two universities – one in Japan and one in Ukraine. The first sample involved 199 non-English majors from Hiroshima University enrolled in an exclusively online general English course focusing on oral communication. A 60 to 90-minute class was held once a week in a 16-week semester. Japanese students possessed low-to-high level ability with weak-to-low motivation and used etextbooks and podcasts. The other group was represented by 60 native Ukrainian-speaking English majors from Kyiv National Linguistic University, who, unlike the Japanese students, had integrated online and face-to-face classes. They had 80-minute classes once/twice a week in a 15/17-week semester focusing on oral communication and translation practices. Ukrainian students demonstrated mid-to-high level ability and mid-to-low motivation and used paper textbooks and handouts. The empirical research was carried out simultaneously at the end of the semester, namely in May and July.

The participants were requested to complete an anonymous Google Forms questionnaire consisting of nine questions – either multiple-choice or open-ended. In this respect the data was collected and analysed by adopting quantitative and qualitative research methods. Regarding the quantitative method, it enabled a statistical analysis approach to the usage of digital backgrounds, operating systems, and software platforms. A qualitative analysis (Mayring, 2015) focusing on content analyses was used in order to gauge the students' views on (1) the effectiveness of online classes over traditional ones, (2) the potential pitfalls of online learning, and

(3) whether there exist any privacy concerns from the students relating to camera-on/camera-off during online classes when using a live-streaming camera.

3. Results and discussion

To receive the highest number of student answers, the feedback form was deliberately limited to nine questions; the four relevant to this paper are included below. Naturally, a potential negative aspect of such an approach is that fewer questions could limit the depth of the analysis. In total, 259 students responded, 60 from Ukraine, and 199 from Japan. The authors accept that this created a numerical imbalance but set out with the aim of acquiring as much student feedback as they could.

The initial questions (refer to [Table 1](#)), aimed at gaining a broad understanding of students' attitudes towards how their privacy might have been impacted by continued use of videoconferencing software. The first two questions concentrated on students' comfortability with the use of videoconferencing software and whether they took any measures to limit intrusion by others into their location. Question 1 focused on the live-streaming aspect of online learning and provided generally positive responses, from both Ukraine and Japan, with a 55% (n=142) favourability. In Question 2 only 20% (n=51) of students used a digital background to conceal their location backgrounds, which indicated that students were not unduly concerned by other class members being able to see from where they were joining the class.

Table 1. Videoconferencing usage

1: Are live-stream cameras comfortable for online learning?			
	YES	NO	DO NOT KNOW
UKRAINE	57%	33%	10%
JAPAN	53%	26%	21%
COMBINED	55%	30%	15%
2: Did you use a digital background to protect your privacy when using videoconferencing software?			
	NO		YES
UKRAINE	45		15
JAPAN	163		36
COMBINED	208		51

[Table 2](#) shows two questions that focused on the depth of student concerns relating to online privacy. Question 3A centred primarily on students' privacy concerns

when using videoconferencing as the main conduit of their language learning classes. The answers showed that respondents from both Japan and Ukraine were not unduly concerned by the use of such technology. When students were asked directly if they had online privacy concerns, 25% (n=66) expressed that they did hold some such reservations. This was an increase of 5% from those that used digital backgrounds, but this figure still reflects that the majority of students in both countries did not express deep concern over how their privacy might be impacted through live-streaming.

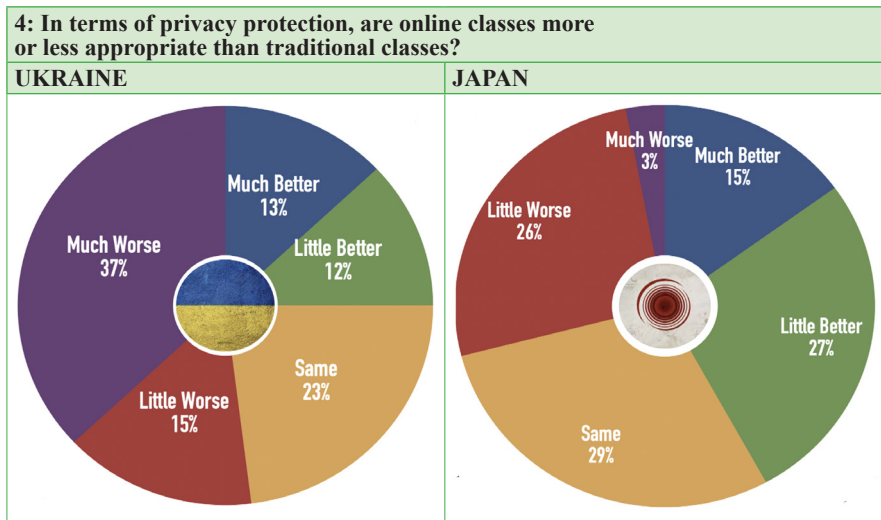
Question 3B asked for further additional explanation from those 25% who had expressed some privacy concerns during live-streaming online classes. When students were asked to elaborate on their answer in Question 3A, the three most popular responses revolved around students’ lack of concern over what others could see of their location. This was due to either nothing revealing being in view or the ability to move their device around to restrict what others could view of their location. Further answers focused on students’ confidence in the privacy settings of the videoconferencing software and the limited and regular number of participants in each class. What the answers from these questions indicated was that students were largely not concerned by others gaining insight into their location, and those that held some level of worry had faith in the in-built privacy settings.

Table 2. Online privacy concerns

3A: Are you worried about online privacy during class?		
	NO	YES
UKRAINE	40	20
JAPAN	153	46
COMBINED	193	66
3B: If you answered ‘no’, what reasons did you have?		
Examples of the most popular responses (ranked in order of frequency)		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nothing behind me. 2. I do not care. 3. Because there's no important information. 4. I don't care about my privacy unless my room is so messy. 5. Because it's only for certain people to see. 6. Because only me and the wall of the room are visible. 7. Because the background of the screen is blurred. 8. Because recording the class is limited. 9. In my case other student can see only wall. 10. It is because I trust the other students. 11. Students taking the class are limited. 12. I try not to show privacy-related things. 13. Because ZOOM/TEAMS have some functions to protect privacy such as mute and camera off. 		

Finally, Question 4 (see Table 3) asked respondents whether they felt online classes offered less privacy protection than traditional classroom-based ones. This question provided the largest discrepancy between Japan and Ukraine, with 52% (n=31) of the former answering that online classes provided ‘much worse’ or ‘little worse’ privacy protection. In comparison, 29% (n=58) Japanese respondents agreed that online classes presented negative privacy obstacles. Focusing on potential positives, 42% of Japanese students (n=103) answered they believed online classes were ‘much better’ or ‘little better’, more than that of their Ukrainian counterparts where only 25% (n=15) held the same opinion.

Table 3. Online vs traditional



4. Conclusions

The reflective paper aimed to provide a snapshot into what privacy concerns, if any, students had whilst participating in online live-streaming classes taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. In truth, both authors were surprised by the results, as our unscientific observations of teaching online courses via videoconferencing software had indicated that privacy issues were a matter of some concern. Yet, the results showed that only a quarter of students in both countries held concerns over privacy, which, although far from conclusive, would seem to suggest that students are comfortable with the technology and were adaptable in how they used it during online classes. To achieve a wider and better understanding of students’ privacy

concerns, further research will be needed before any definitive conclusions can be reached.

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