



Participation, inclusion, and success in emergency remote online teaching and learning

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Abstract. Covid-19 affected educational institutions worldwide, and many moved online engaging in Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL). It had a particular impact in Japan due to the low levels of computer usage in Japanese educational institutions and a reliance on traditional methods. This study uses semi-structured interviews with five participants to explore their perceptions of the move to online learning in a Japanese university context. Four factors emerged as significant: participants' experiences prior to entering university; the importance of Social Networking Systems (SNS) in the process of becoming part of the university academic community; changes in spoken interactional patterns; and changes in learning patterns. It was found that the disruption due to ERTL led to fresh ways to learn and promoted an inclusive environment.

Keywords: ERTL, disruptive technology, multimodal learning, inclusive learning.

1. Introduction

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic had an enormous impact on educational institutions worldwide. Many schools and universities moved their learning online suddenly and engaged in what is termed ERTL. It had a particular impact in Japan due to the low levels of computer usage in Japanese educational institutions and a reliance on traditional methods (Takashiro, 2018). The aim of this study is to understand the students' perceptions of the effects of this disruption on their learning.

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2. Method

The present study formed part of a larger research project exploring how the sudden move to online learning affected the students. Five participants took part in semi-structured interviews in English on Zoom for between 45 minutes and two hours and 45 minutes. Both open and closed questions were used to explore participants' perceptions. There were three male and two female Japanese participants aged between 18 and 21. The audio recordings were uploaded to a transcription application, Otter.ai, and the resulting transcripts were then manually corrected. They were then read multiple times and coded using the SCAT method developed by [Otani \(2008\)](#) which consists of four steps: identifying noteworthy words or phrases from the text; paraphrasing them; establishing concepts that emerge from the text; and developing themes from the data.

3. Results and discussion

Four overarching themes emerged: the importance of the participants' experiences prior to entering university; the importance of SNS in the process of becoming part of the university academic community; changes in spoken interactional patterns due to moving online; and changes in learning patterns.

During the pandemic, Japanese high schools did not go online and students who matriculated directly from school reported adaptation issues due to a lack of community connections and change in learning style. In contrast, students who had had a year off before entering university to prepare for the university entrance examinations, common at prestigious universities in Japan, found it easier to adapt, and reported little change in their lifestyles, as Participant 4 noted, "Actually last year I was in [sic] home so nothing changed". Also, first-year students who matriculated in September 2019, rather than the usual April 2020 in Japan, had already developed a community before embarking on ERTL and found the transition less problematic. Participant 1, for example, said, "I am lucky I met my friends and teachers and so feel comfortable even though it is hard".

Prior experience using Information and Communications Technology (ICT), both academically and socially, was also a key factor in students' ability to participate in their new online environment. [Healy \(2021\)](#) found that nearly all students had access to mobile technology; 98% owned a smartphone, usually received in junior high school, and 94% a laptop computer largely purchased on entering

university, with only 19% owning desktop computers and 32% tablets. Three had extensive experience using computers at home as their families had owned and used computers since they were small children, while the other two participants had little prior experience. Four of the participants who attended Japanese schools also had almost no experience using ICT in academic contexts, saying the main way they used technology was to take photographs of the blackboard or handouts. In contrast, one student who had attended an international school in Japan had significant experience using ICT both socially and academically. All participants were active users of SNS, the most popular applications being LINE, followed by Twitter and Instagram (Healy, 2021). Prior to entering university, SNS was a way of connecting with friends and a method of entertainment. After entering university the students found that their use of applications changed. Before university the participants reported using Twitter to connect with their friends and follow the news, but after, it became a way of finding information about what was happening at the university, “Twitter is to collect information about classes. Before it was fun. I previous use Twitter to communicate with friends or I use them without thinking. But now I watch carefully to collect information and I don’t tweet anymore [sic]” (Participant 2). Similarly, while in the past they had used LINE to communicate with friends and family, it was now also used by teachers to create online classrooms and study groups, and became a place where students interacted concerning their studies. This usage provided support for students while they were physically isolated from their peers, and all of the participants commented on how important it was for them. Participant 3 said, “I use SNS everyday to talk to my classmates and ask about homework. I can also ask my teacher questions on LINE. It is better than email”. Japanese university students are often not familiar with email, but are very familiar with LINE. Using SNS can provide vital inclusion and support encouraging success in academic contexts. As a result, it is important that all students can access and use SNS and ICT equally.

The participants noted changes in the spoken interaction online compared to the traditional classroom. Due to the computer conversation lag, they found that turn-taking was impacted. Students experienced difficulty and were frustrated by frequently and unintentionally interrupting each other. However, they noted an interesting finding: increased participation from students in online classes compared to the face-to-face classroom. Japanese students have been characterized as silent in the classroom (Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017), but the participants reported a change in this tendency online: “Before the online, they are not eager to speak, you know speak first. But thanks to online they are encouraged to speak by themselves [sic]” (Participant 5). Another way that led

to increased student participation was the use of the chat function in conjunction with spoken interaction. Students enjoyed the multimodality: “In some classes they have a chat while the professor is speaking. It is good for people to have another way to communicate” (Participant 4).

Along with changes in spoken interaction the participants noted changes in their learning patterns. They described a number of different kinds of online classes including Zoom discussions and presentations, videos with online assignments, and PDF files to be completed. The participants stated that they enjoyed the Zoom classes because they could interact with the other students and teachers. They also enjoyed the classes in which they watched videos and completed some assignments as these allowed the students to organize their time themselves, increasing their autonomy (Baru, Tenggara, & Mataram, 2020). This also enabled them to work at their own pace, watching and re-watching the videos as needed. The participants’ least preferred method of study was completing asynchronous PDF based assignments and uploading them to the university LMS due to a lack of interaction and feedback.

The changes in both educational and interactional patterns had a significant impact on all participants, but in particular, two of the participants found the move to online learning beneficial. Participant 1, who has dyslexia, stated that his grades improved as a result of having access to class materials in a variety of forms, especially videos that he could watch repeatedly while taking notes. This sentiment was echoed by all of the students. Participant 5, who has autism, also preferred working online as he likes to focus only on words, does not like to engage in eye contact or physical gestures, and prefers to work alone. Being online reduced the stress he feels during face-to-face social interactions although he questioned whether it was better in terms of second language acquisition. Multimodal forms of online interaction can provide affordances and opportunities enhancing educational opportunities for all (Guichon & Cohen, 2016).

4. Conclusions

While ERTL is often viewed negatively, the disruption it caused may have provided a necessary push for institutions and teachers in Japan to move away from traditional instructional approaches leading to positive gains for many students, particularly neurodiverse students. This new environment provided fresh ways for our students to participate and succeed and should be harnessed positively for the future.

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