A case study on exploring the motivation of English-major EFL students in online exchange programs

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the education sector worldwide, prompting a swift transition to technology-driven learning solutions. One notable response to this challenge has been the introduction of online versions of study-abroad and international exchange programs. Considering the limited existing research on how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students perceive online international exchange programs, this study investigated their views. A survey conducted among 84 students from a private women's university in the Kansai area of Japan in August 2021 revealed that an overwhelming majority (93%) expressed a desire to participate, and their recognition of the distinct advantages offered by online exchange programs. Approximately half of the respondents indicated their willingness to engage in non-credit programs, while a similar percentage conveyed that academic credits could enhance their motivation to participate. Notably, the latter group's seemingly extrinsic motivation was largely self-determined, with their primary goal being program participation. These findings underscore the potential for online international exchanges to be well-received by students, particularly when academic credits are awarded. Additionally, correspondence analysis highlights that the desire to earn academic credits is a topic of interest across all school year levels.

Keywords: COVID-19, CALL, motivation, KH Coder, online exchange programs

Introduction

Individual differences in motivation toward second language (L2) learning, have long been considered a very important predictor of success (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner et al., 1997; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Noels, 2013). Dörnyei (2001, p. 5) claims: Indeed, in the vast majority of cases, learners with sufficient

motivation can achieve a working knowledge of an L2, but if they do not have sufficient motivation, "even the brightest learners are unlikely to persist long enough to attain any really useful language." Simultaneously, as the challenge of motivating L2 learners has been noted since the 1980s (Daniels, 1994; Veenman, 1984), a great deal of research has been conducted on how to motivate L2 learners (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001, 2005; Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; Lamb, 2017; Ushioda, 2007, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on education worldwide, including the motivation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, and a challenge in coping with the sudden shift to remote or online learning. Adapting to a new mode of learning, lack of social interactions, mental health, and stress, contributed to a decline in students' motivation (Yamamoto & Teaman, 2020). To address this issue, Yamamoto (2022) has proposed that students' motivation be enhanced through online cultural exchanges when traditional avenues for language learning and cultural exchange may be limited.

Although the pandemic has now subsided, it remains crucial to investigate students' perceptions of online forms of international exchange for several reasons. First, understanding these perceptions can aid in preparing for future emergency situations that may disrupt conventional study-abroad programs. Second, exploring cost-effective online forms of study-abroad experiences can be beneficial for both students and institutions. Most importantly, it opens possibilities for the diverse use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to enhance EFL learners' motivation.

Literature review

Post-2020: The role of CALL

CALL is a broad term, which involves learning languages via computers, and has been applied to the educational context, including study-abroad programs. Computer-mediated communication, encompassing both synchronous and asynchronous methods, has become a tool for providing students with authentic communication. In study-abroad programs, CALL played a role by supporting students in preparing to learn the target language to make their experiences worthwhile. Scholars such as Garrett (2009), Back (2013), Lee (2011), and Brine et al. (2015) have demonstrated the effectiveness of various CALL tools, including online intensive listening practice, social media, blogs, and video recording interviews, in enhancing students' communication skills and intercultural competence, before and during study-abroad programs.

Ever since the pandemic, CALL's role has become even more significant in compensating for the cancelled face-to-face interactions. Schenker (2021) introduced online journaling to promote linguistic progress in writing, and Krishnan et al. (2021) utilized virtual reality in "Virtual Experiential Intercultural Learning" to enhance students' intercultural competencies. The pandemic also accelerated the popularity of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which offer learners the opportunity to access expert knowledge for free of charge or

at a minimal cost. Impey (2020) explains that MOOCs have seen an exponential growth, with a staggering 640 % increase in enrollments in 2020 compared to the previous year (Impey, 2020). Although MOOCs have yet to be fully integrated into Japanese universities, this trend could pave the way for the further development of CALL for EFL students. One issue of MOOCs is its high dropout rate (El Said, 2017; Li & Wei, 2021; Shou et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023), which has been reported as high as 95% for courses offered by prestigious universities such as MIT, Stanford University (Shou et al., 2022). As one solution to the dropout problem, using MOOCs in the context of a university-accredited program was suggested by El Said (2017).

The role of CALL in motivating learners

Motivation, one of the key elements of individual differences in second language (L2) learning, has long been considered a significant predictor of its success (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner et al., 1997; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Noels, 2013, among others). Dörnyei (2001, p. 5) noted that "learners with sufficient motivation can achieve a working knowledge of an L2." However, without it, he claimed, "even the brightest learners are unlikely to persist long enough to attain any really useful language" (p.5). Many researchers point out that the use of information technology can positively influence second language learners' motivation (e.g., Adara & Haqiyah, 2021; Džanić & Hasanspahić, 2020; Genç & Aydin, 2011; Prensky, 2001; Raby, 2007; White, 2014). Warschauer (1996) noted that one of the purposes of CALL is to enhance motivation. Azmi (2017) emphasized that "CALL-based teaching creates more vibrancy and interaction in the EFL classroom" and "the use of CALL may provide a learning environment in which motivation is maintained and enhanced" (p.112). White (2014) called for a change in Japan's teaching methodology to motivate students to study English at home and abroad, as the statements of the respondents in White's study revealed that using a CALL program could reduce the anxiety, they experienced prior to studying abroad.

Introducing online international exchange programs is one of such attempts to positively impact students' motivation. Slotkin et al. (2012) highlighted the benefits of blended learning that can provide short-term study abroad opportunities to distance-learning students, who have historically been underserved due to economic reasons. For such students, program viability is ensured through CALL's maintenance of academic content hour requirements (Slotkin et al., 2012).

Providing such opportunities is particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic (Do & Le, 2022; Keržič et al., 2021; Santos, & Vélez Ruiz, 2021; Talpur, et al., 2021; Wang & Liu, 2022), when traditional avenues for language learning and cultural exchange are limited. Yamamoto (2022) has described how most respondents' motivation was enhanced through online cultural exchanges during the pandemic. Liu and Shirley (2021) transformed a study-abroad course into an online format using Collaborative Online International Learning and virtual reality technologies. Upson and Bergiel (2023) also endorsed "Virtual

Study-Abroad" programs, highlighting that they offer benefits comparable to those of traditional study-abroad programs. Japan has introduced a range of online study-abroad programs with different durations, encompassing both credited and non-credited courses (Iwamoto, 2020; Nakano et al., 2020; Yamamoto, 2022). In light of the diverse capabilities within Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), this study centers on the examination of students' motivation in the context of short-term online exchange programs conducted during the pandemic.

Impact of academic credits on CALL-mediated international exchange

While the linguistic and cultural benefits and problems of study-abroad programs or inter-cultural exchanges on students' emotions, both positive and negative, have been reported (Dong & Ishige, 2022; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2021), investigations into a variety of factors which can influence these students' decision to join the program are insufficient (Anderson & Lawton, 2015), and even fewer studies have investigated these students' motivation to join online exchange programs. A variety of factors, such as the ease of not having to travel, incurring low or no costs to interact with people in any country, no matter how distant they are, can play a role in motivating students to engage in online inter-cultural communication. Other motivators might be the same as non-online study-abroad studies: academic motivations and social ties (Naffziger et al., 2010); students' achievement motivation; neophilia; migrant personality and desire to help (Li et al., 2013); international travel; escape; academic credits; and social factors (Nyaupane et al., 2011), which Nyaupane et al. claimed to have a significant impact on students' decision to choose a program at a particular destination.

Among possible factors that could motivate students to join a CALL-mediated international exchange, this study will focus on academic credits. This perspective is important as awarding credits entails the maintenance of academic content hour requirements, which is complex for both institutions and students. Furthermore, this study aims to uncover whether students' perceptions of online exchange programs differ based on their academic year levels, an aspect that has not been thoroughly examined. One of the concerns in CALL related motivation research is the novelty effect. Stockwell (2013) noted that while technology can initially attract interest, the "Bells and whistles" effect (p. 158) is short lived. To cope with this issue, other incentives may come into play. In this study, I will consider how credits might help sustain motivation beyond this initial effect. Given the scarcity of prior research on students' perspectives concerning the novelty effect, this investigation holds significant value.

Research questions

This study explores the perceptions of potential respondents in online exchange programs, focusing on English-major EFL university students. It addresses the following three research questions:

1. To what extent are English-major EFL university students willing to participate in short-term online international exchange programs?
2. How significant is the role of academic credits in influencing English-major EFL university students' decisions to join a short-term online exchange program?
3. Do English-major EFL students' perceptions of short-term online exchange programs differ depending on their school-year levels?

Method

Respondents and procedures

A survey was conducted in August 2021, involving 84 students from a private women's university in Kansai are in Japan. All respondents were English majors and were enrolled in one of the four English language courses for which the author was responsible. The participant pool consisted of 13 first year, 25 second year, 21 third year, and 23 fourth year students. The questionnaire used in this study was designed to be anonymous and did not request information about the respondents' nationality or proficiency level. Students' proficiency levels were estimated based on TOEIC® scores, ranging from 400 to above 900. Prior to the survey, all participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained via email.

Data collection

Considering the cancellation of study abroad and international exchanges at our university, online international exchange programs were introduced in 2020, involving students from Egypt and Palestine (Table 1), with no academic credits offered. In these online projects, participating students received instructions on how to collaborate with their peers digitally, including on the use of Flipgrid®, a video platform to share and express through short movies.

Table 1. Examples of short-term non-credited exchange programs held on campus

Program title	Number of participants	Country	Time and procedure	Themes
Arab- Japan Youth Dialogues on Gender and Peace	10	Egypt (time difference: seven hours)	2020.12/7 Live session (Zoom) 2 hours 2021. 2 /8 Live session (Zoom) 2 hours Two 90-minute lectures and practice before each session	1. The role of Youth in Combating Negative Stereotypes Against Women 2. Youth as Champion of Change
Online Cultural Exchange with B University (Palestine)	11	Palestine (time difference: 7 hours)	2021. 3/10 students posted short self-introduction videos (30 seconds to 1 minute) on Flipgrid. 3/10–24 groups discussed their plans for topic videos. 3/25 there was a live closing session (Zoom) where students discussed what they had learned and provided feedback.	Sharing cultural and daily life experiences from their countries

Conversely, an online exchange program with Taiwanese students was conducted in the same academic year and did offer academic credit. In this program, participants were required to fulfill additional responsibilities, including pre- and post-class requirements, as well as submitting post-exchange reports, in addition to instructions on digital collaborations. After explaining the merits and demerits of credited and non-credited exchange courses, study participants were asked to answer the following questions on Google Forms.

Question 1. Do you want to participate in online international exchange programs, in which you can communicate with students overseas, using video conferencing systems, such as Zoom or Skype? Please select one of the following options.

 #1. I will not participate, regardless of whether I receive credits.
 #2. I will participate if credits are awarded.
 #3. I will participate regardless of whether I receive credits or not.

Question 2. Please explain why you chose your answer to question 1.

Respondents' data was collected using Google Forms, a component of Google's web-based suite of applications. It is a free application for collecting and distributing surveys (Mallette & Barone, 2013). The convenience of conducting surveys without the hassles of dealing with paper copies has made the use of Google Forms increasingly common (Scheef & Johnson, 2017). These features were a motivating factor for the author's choice to use them in this study.

 All respondents (N = 84) provided answers to Question 1. The data were tabulated for further analyses. A total of 82 students responded. Question 2. To gain insights into the motivations behind their responses, qualitative data

analysis was conducted using KH Coder 3.0, a computer-assisted statistical text mining analysis software engineered by Higuchi (2016). Respondents' free-text responses were predominantly written in Japanese; however, 6 out of 82 students expressed their ideas in English. In this study, Japanese data was translated into English before analysis instead of analyzing the Japanese data and then translating the results into English. Higuchi (2020) suggested that both methods are correct, although the latter method might be preferable, considering the difficulty of translation and the opportunity to present the study in Japanese. I opted for the former approach as this study was intended for English presentation and publication.

When translating Japanese responses into English, care was taken to preserve the original Japanese meaning as much as possible. To avoid redundancy in terminology with synonymous meanings, equivalent terms were consolidated into a single word. For example, the Japanese words "get," "gain," "obtain," and "earn," all synonymous with the Japanese term "Eru," were unified into the superordinate word "get." A glossary of key terms and their translations was created to ensure consistency and reduce the risk of varied interpretations (for additional examples, see Appendix A). Throughout the analysis process, regular cross-checking was conducted to validate the translated terms against the original Japanese texts. Additionally, the collocation statistics function was used to examine the context of how the target words were used in the original text during the analysis.

To effectively capture the perceptions of respondents on the online exchange programs, functional words were removed from the analysis, and only content words (nouns, adjectives, and verbs) were extracted. The word "think" was excluded from the analyses because it appeared frequently and did not convey a particularly important meaning. Furthermore, "do" was excluded because it was often used as an auxiliary verb, indicating no specific meaning.

Results

Data analysis 1

The responses to Question 1 are presented in Table 2 (for complete responses, see Appendix B). A total of 6 (7%) students selected answer #1 (I will not participate, regardless of whether I receive credits or not), 36 (43%) chose answer #2 (I will participate if credits are awarded), and 42 (50%) opted for answer #3 (I will participate regardless of whether I receive credits or not). Thus, 78 (93%) students expressed their willingness to participate in online exchange programs.

Table 2. Respondents' chosen answers regarding online exchange programs

Year	#1	#2	#3	Total
1	0	7	6	13
2	1	13	12	26
3	3	9	10	22
4	2	7	14	23
Total	6 (7 %)	36 (43%)	42 (50%)	84

Data analysis 2

Table 3 shows the frequency with which each word was uttered by the respondents. It lists each of the extracted words used four or more times in the responses, categorized by parts of speech. The threshold of four was chosen to balance between capturing significant repetition and maintaining a focused list of words. The list of words that appeared lower than four times were too extensive and less useful for identifying key themes. If it were higher, there was a risk of missing out on important but slightly less frequent words.

In total, 1,565 words were analyzed, with 296 different words included in the analysis. The dataset contained 108 sentences, with no differentiation between plural and singular forms of words.

Table 3. List of words used four or more times

Nouns		Adjectives		Verbs	
people	27	overseas	10	want	39
credit	24	good	9	get	27
opportunity	18	interested	6	have	20
English	13	able	5	participate	16
country	9	online	5	interact	14
program	7	different	4	speak	15
skill	6	native	4	improve	10
way	6			learn	9
friend	5			take	5
fun	4			connect	4
interaction	4			make	4
online	4			practice	4
student	4				

An analysis of the responses revealed frequently used nouns, adjectives, and verbs, shedding light on their perceptions of online exchange programs. Notably, the most used nouns were 'people,' followed by 'credits,' which aligned with the survey's primary focus.

Several nouns, adjectives, and verbs, including 'skill,' 'interested,' 'speak,'

'improve,' 'participate,' 'practice,' and 'learn,' emerged as being frequently used in the responses. These findings indicate the respondents' strong willingness to engage in online interactions with people from different countries and suggest that they perceived online exchange programs as opportunities to enhance their language skills, practice communication, and learn from diverse cultural experiences.

Data analysis 3: Co-occurrence networks

Next, the KH coder was used to generate co-occurrence networks, which present the relationships between the keywords identified in the respondents' free writing. The two co-occurrence networks of free writing (reasons for choosing either #2 or #3) are shown below. The minimum frequency of each word was set to 10, and the number of edges was set to 60. The thickness of these lines indicates a strong co-occurrence relationship between the words. The size of the circle indicates the frequency, and its color indicates the subgraph. The dotted line indicates the link to a word in the other subgraphs.

Reasons for selecting #1

Only six participants selected option #1 (I will not participate regardless of whether I receive credits or not). This small subset is not indicative of any discernible patterns or networks. Instead, all responses are listed here to identify any characteristics or common perspectives.

R-1: I do not feel like doing it online (second year).

R-2: I am not very confident in my English skills, but I want to participate because I am interested in interacting with various people (third year).

R-3: I enjoy speaking with international students at this university, and I am satisfied with it. However, I think it is worth participating in such programs considering the current situation, in which we cannot study abroad (third year).

R-4: As it is not a direct exchange, I am sure that I will not be proactive. If so, I do not think that there is much point in participating (fourth year).

R-5: Considering this situation, online communication is becoming more mainstream, and it is easier to engage with people living in other countries. I am very interested in this kind of exchange because speaking with people from other countries could help me in discovering many things that are different from or the same as my own country (fourth year).

R-6: I sometimes find it difficult to convey what I want to say when I speak with a native speaker in an online classroom. It is easier to communicate face-to-face (third year).

Comments by R-1, R-4, and R-6 suggest that respondents feel less motivated to join online interactions if they are not direct interactions, which could impact their level of engagement. R-2, R-3, and R-5 expressed their positive opinions of and interest in the program, somewhat contradicting with their choice of

option. In fact, it can be said that there were practically only three participants who were not interested in online exchange programs.

Reasons for selecting #2

The data derived from the free-text responses of respondents who selected option #2 (I will participate on the condition that credits are awarded) are shown in Figure 1 and Table 4.
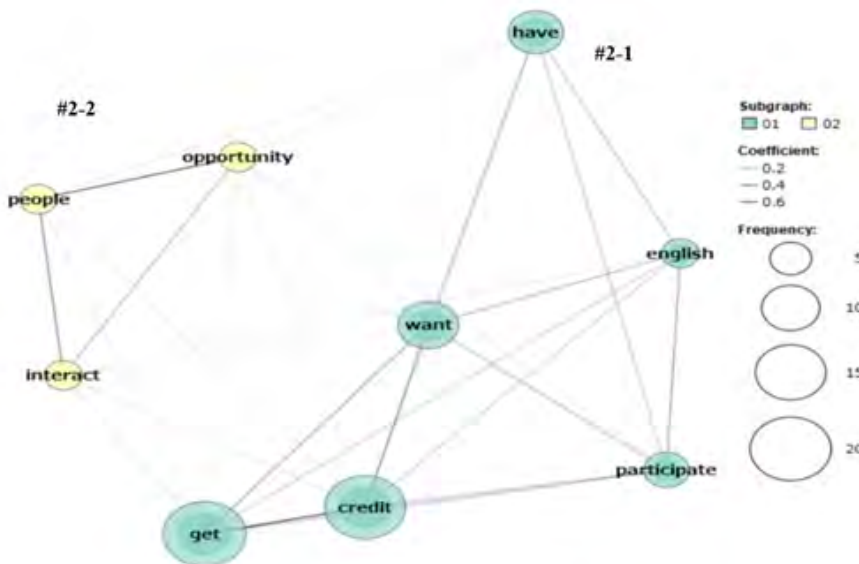

Figure 1. Co-occurrence network (n = 36): free writings on the reasons for selecting #2

Subgraph #2-1: have, English, want, participate, credit, and get

R-10: I want to test my English ability by making overseas friends and learning about other countries' cultures (second year).

R-14: I want to participate to get experience if I can obtain credits for it (second year).

R-16: I do not have enough credits; so, I do not have time for anything other than credit-related activities (third year).

R-21: I think I can do my best without slacking off, if credits are at stake (fourth year, two other similar responses).

R-26: I am busy; so, I do not have time to do it just for something outside class (first year).

R-27: I want to prioritize preparing for other classes that award credits (first year).

R-14, R-16, R-26, and R-27 expressed that credits were the deciding factor for their participation, while R-10 expressed only a positive view about the program. R-21 believed that credits motivated and prevented her from slacking off.

Subgraph #2-2: opportunity, people, interact

R-8: There are limited <u>opportunities</u> to communicate with <u>people</u> overseas (second year).

R-28: I want to take this <u>opportunity</u> to <u>interact</u> and make friends with <u>people</u> from overseas (first year).

R-29: I already have <u>opportunities</u> to talk to <u>people</u> in other countries (first year).

R-39: I can learn English while I am in Japan by <u>interact</u>ing with overseas students online (third year).

R-8, R-28, and R-39 expressed positive views about online exchange programs, without mentioning the word 'credits.' As deduced from the keywords in Figure 1, the comments in #2 can be categorized into the following four types (Table 4).

Type A: Respondents who regarded credit as a deciding factor (e.g., R-26, R-27, R-16, and R-14).

Type B: Respondents who regarded credit as a motivator (e.g., R-21).

Type C: Respondents who were positive about online exchange programs without any mention of credits (e.g., R-10, R-28, R-8, and R-39).

Type D: Respondents who were neutral about online exchange programs without any mention of credits (e.g., R-29).

Type A comments may stem from extrinsic motivation, while Types B and C reflect a more self-determined nature, closely aligned with intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Table 4. Types of reasons for selecting #2

Type	Example	Number of responses
A: Credits are a deciding factor	Because I want to get more credits.	11
B: Credits will be a motivator	If I can get some credits, I will be more active in the program.	6
C: No mention of credits (positive)	I think it is good to be able to have international exchange easily and safely, as it is difficult to go abroad in this situation.	15
D: No mention of credits (neutral)	I have a notion that it is difficult to have an interaction online.	4

Reasons for selecting #3

Data derived from the free writings of respondents who selected #3 (I will participate regardless of whether I receive credits or not) are depicted in Figure 2.
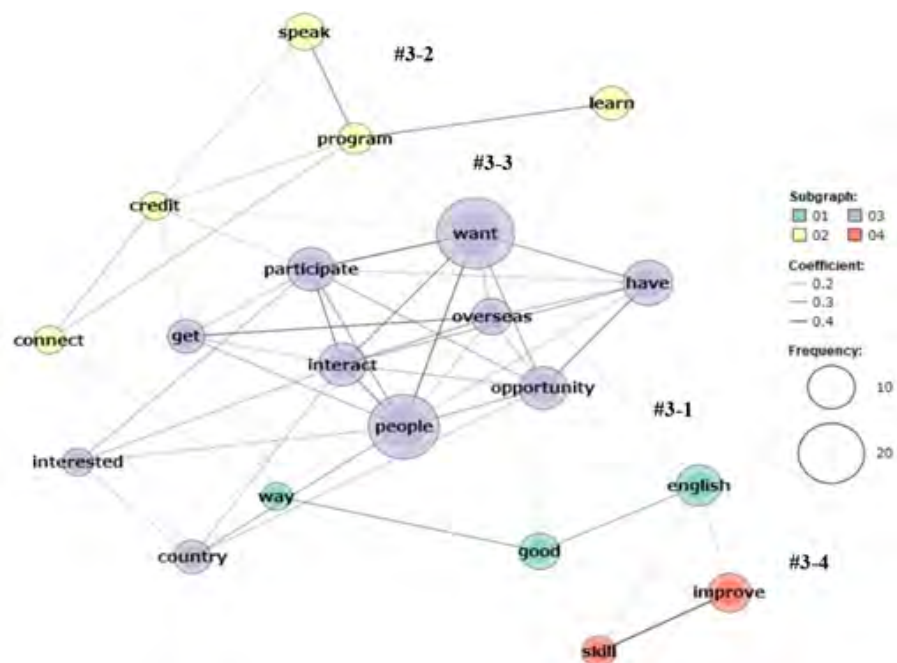
Figure 2. Co-occurrence network (n = 42): Free writings on the reasons for selecting answer #3

Subgraph #3-1: English, good, way

R-48: I believe it will be <u>good</u> for me (second year).

R-61: I think it is a very useful program for people who want to learn <u>English</u> during the Coronavirus pandemic, when it is not easy to study abroad (fourth year).

R-62: It is a great <u>way</u> for me to acquire new perspectives and knowledge. Additionally, interacting with people overseas is a <u>good</u> <u>way</u> to increase output. I want to participate in such programs irrespective of credits availability (fourth year).

R-73: I think it is a <u>good</u> <u>way</u> to improve my <u>English</u> skills (fourth year).

These words were mostly used to link the program to improvements in English skills.

Subgraph #3-2: learn, speak, program, credit, connect

R-52: I think I can become more motivated and <u>learn</u> more about English by interacting with overseas students (second year).

R-60: I think it will be fun and beneficial for me to be able to <u>connect</u> with people from other countries, as I am unable to go there because of the Coronavirus pandemic (fourth year).

R-62: I want to actively participate in such <u>programs</u> regardless of <u>credits</u> availability (fourth year).

R-70: I want to <u>learn</u> about different countries' English accents (first year).

R-74: I cannot <u>speak</u> English at all; so, I definitely want to <u>learn</u> English through such <u>programs</u> (third year).

R-76: <u>Credits</u> are not important. I just want to have opportunities to <u>speak</u> English (fourth- year).

R-81: I want to participate in this <u>program</u> regardless of whether I can get <u>credits</u> or not because in a previous non-<u>credit</u> <u>program</u>, I made friends, and we are still <u>connected</u> (second year).

R-82: I really want to try it out because it offers a rare opportunity, that I have never had before, of <u>connecting</u> with people from all over the world... (fourth year).

These words in the co-occurrence network indicate the respondents' positive views about the program, which will offer them the opportunity to learn English and connect with people overseas. While respondents 62 and 76 explicitly stated that credits held little significance, only four, which included R-62 and R-76, employed the term 'credit' to convey that they did not need academic credits.

Subgraph #3-3: have, want, overseas, opportunity, participate, interact, people, get, interested, and country

R-47: I <u>want</u> to <u>participate</u> because I am <u>interested</u> in <u>interact</u>ing with various <u>people</u> (third year).

R-52: I think I can become more motivated to learn English by <u>interact</u>ing with <u>overseas</u> students (second year).

R-53: I can <u>get</u> involved with <u>people</u> from <u>overseas</u> anytime, anywhere (third year).

R-55: It was a valuable <u>opportunity</u> to <u>interact</u> with <u>people</u> from other <u>countries</u> without leaving Japan (third year).

R-66: I <u>want</u> a place where I can test my skills because the places where I can <u>interact</u> have become fewer and fewer owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (first year).

R-68: I <u>want</u> to broaden my perspective (first year).

R-77: I <u>want</u> to <u>participate</u> because I think that <u>interact</u>ing with <u>people</u> from other countries, and listening to different <u>people</u>'s opinions will benefit and help me understand others. I have a strong desire to <u>participate</u> in any programs that will provide me with such <u>opportunities</u> (third year).

Similar positive views were observed in this subgraph. In other words, the respondents showed interest in taking advantage of the program and interacting with people overseas.

Subgraph #3-4: improve, skill

R-44: I want to further <u>improve</u> my English (second year).

R-58: I think that if one does not take positive actions, one will be unable to <u>improve</u> one's English (fourth year).

R-69: I think that I can <u>improve</u> my English <u>skills</u> the most by speaking with other people (first year).

R-75: I think it will be a good opportunity to <u>improve</u> my communication <u>skills</u> (third year).

In this subgraph, the respondents' desire to improve their English skills was reflected. Overall, Figure 2 depicts words that are associated with respondents' unwavering enthusiasm to participate in online exchange programs, reflecting their intrinsic motivation.

Correspondence analysis

Next, using data from the free-text responses of those who chose answers #2 and #3 (n = 78), a correspondence analysis was conducted to visually interpret the characteristics of students at each of the year levels (Figure 3).
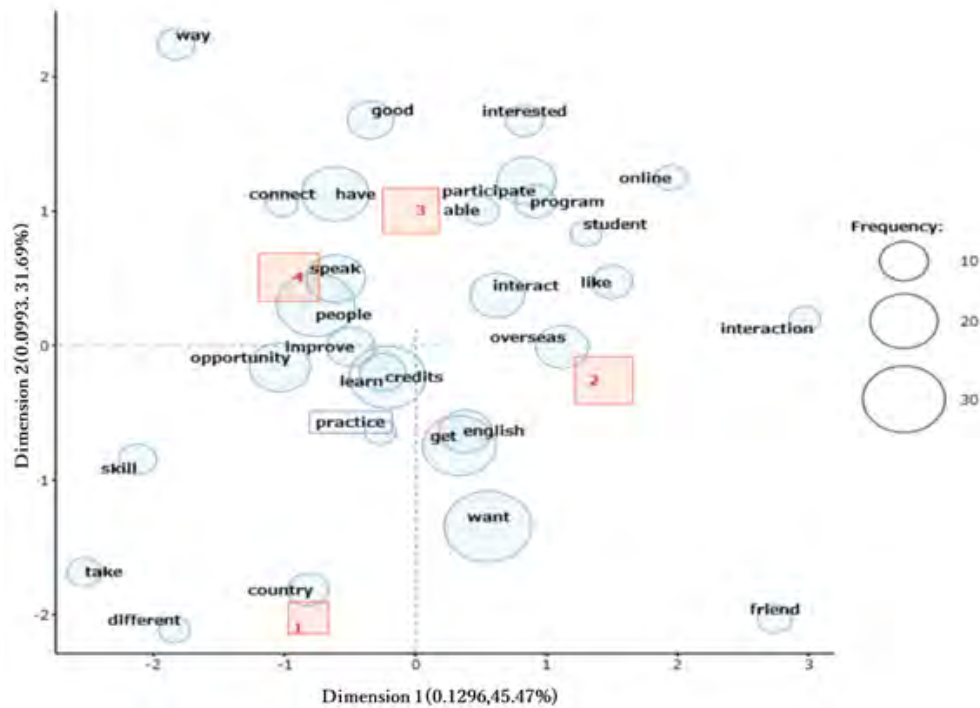

Figure 3. Correspondence analysis (n = 76)

This correspondence analysis displays words describing each year's characteristics around rectangular external variables representing the year levels (1, 2, 3, and 4). Words near the origin with large bubbles (e.g., people, improve, credits, learn) are commonly used in each external variable (year level) placed in four directions from the origin. Words farther away from the origin were more characteristic. In Figure 3, 'take', 'different', 'skill', and 'country' in the first-year direction, and 'friend' in the first- and second year direction, 'way' in the third- and fourth year direction are considered characteristic of respective

year levels. Other than these, no particularly characteristic words were found at any of the year levels. The word, 'friend(s)', which was most characteristic of first- and second year respondents were used as follows:

R-10: I want to test my English ability and make <u>friends</u> from overseas and learn about other countries ' cultures (second year).

R-28: I want to take this opportunity to interact and make <u>friends</u> with people from overseas (first year).

R- 46: I want to make <u>friends</u> overseas (second year).

The word, 'way', which was characteristic of third- and fourth year students were used in the following comments.

R-36: I think that actually speaking English is the best <u>way</u> to improve my English (third year).

R-40: ...It 's a good <u>way</u> to practice speaking English by interacting online (third year).

R-62: It is a great <u>way</u> for me to acquire new perspectives and knowledge. Additionally, interacting with people overseas is a <u>good</u> <u>way</u> to increase output. I want to participate in such programs irrespective of credits availability (fourth year).

R-82: ...It's a rare opportunity to connect with people from all over the world in a <u>way</u> I've never had before (fourth year).

Although both groups indicated positive views about online exchange, the frequently appeared word, 'way' of the upper-year students suggests a stronger inclination to focus on improving language skills and a more sophisticated understanding of the nuances of online interactions. Additional characteristic words employed by third- and fourth year students included 'good,' 'have,' and 'connect,' further supporting this inclination. Moreover, pandemic-related comments were notably more prominent among older students.

R-41: I think it 's good to be able to have international exchange easily and safely since it 's hard to go abroad in this situation (third year).

R-57: Because it is online, I can meet people I have never <u>had</u> contact with before through the common language of English (third year).

R-60: I think it will be fun and beneficial for me to be able to connect with people from other countries, as I am unable to go there because of the Coronavirus pandemic (fourth year).

The word 'credit' was prominently located near the center, indicating its consistent use by respondents across all year levels (Figure 3). In total, the term 'credit' appeared 26 times. Of these occurrences, four instances reflected a desire to participate irrespective of academic credits, while the remaining 22 instances were predominantly related to comments emphasizing academic credits as a motivating factor for joining online exchange programs.

Discussion

This study focused on students' willingness to participate in online exchange programs and the impact of academic credits as an incentive to participate. For these purposes, three research questions were addressed. In response to the first research question: "To what extent are EFL university students willing to participate in short-term online international exchange programs?", the survey results revealed that among the 84 respondents, an overwhelming majority (93%, n=78) expressed a willingness to participate in such programs. This finding aligns with the assertions about the relationship between CALL and motivation by Warschauer (1996) and Azmi (2017). While this outcome was expected, given that the research participants were all English-major students actively seeking opportunities to enhance their English proficiency, there were varying reasons for non-participation (7%, n=6). Specifically, two respondents explicitly mentioned their lack of motivation to engage in online interactions while three students expressed interest in the program; however, this interest did not translate into active participation. Curiously, one respondent provided exclusively positive feedback about online programs but ultimately chose not to participate. In summary, the reasons for non-participation can be attributed to a combination of feelings of anxiety and a lack of interest.

As White's (2014) study demonstrated, anxiety that respondents have before online programs can be alleviated using CALL such as using online videos to practice speaking. Adequate preparation and rehearsals before the actual exchange could boost students' confidence and performance. For students lacking interest, the integration of virtual reality technology, as demonstrated by Upson and Bergiel (2023), can effectively pique their interest. Such technology has the potential to provide a highly immersive experience, allowing students to feel as if they were physically present in their exchange partner's country.

In response to the second research question: "How significant is the role of academic credits in influencing students' decisions to join a short-term online exchange program?", among the 78 respondents who expressed willingness to participate, 42 (54%) indicated their motivation to join irrespective of credits' availability, while 36 (46%) responded that they would participate if academic credits were awarded.

Considering that the participants are all English-major students, it is not surprising that a majority are motivated by personal growth, not by credits. However, this does not mean that the 46% of respondents who prefer credits are solely extrinsically motivated. Among this substantial minority, many expressed a high level of engagement and interest in communication and skill development, as evidenced by their remarks.

R-21: I think I can do my best without slacking off if credits are at stake.

R-23: I think I can work seriously to earn credits. If I don't get the credit, I might get discouraged.

R-40: I will work hard in preparation and during the exchange to get a high score if I can get credits. Also, It 's a good way to practice speaking English by interacting online.

They demonstrated a clear demand for formal recognition, which is crucial for maintaining engagement and motivation. As seen in the following remarks, online projects can be regarded as less valuable than in-person ones:

R-25: I have an image that it is hard to have an interaction if it is online.

R-37: I am not comfortable with the idea of online interaction. Of course, I think it is a good opportunity, but the fact that it is online makes me feel less motivated than in person. Also, in my experience, online interactions only end up being a one-time event. Therefore, I would like to participate even if I am busy and if it is for credit.

Awarding credits can elevate the perceived importance of online projects. Ignoring their need for credits could lead to disengagement and reduced motivation among nearly half of the participants.

Even after the initial excitement of novelty effect of "Bells and whistles" (Stockwell, 2013) fades, online exchanges may continue to motivate students with the incentive of academic credits.

The results of the correspondence analysis pertaining to the third research question: "Do students' perceptions towards short-term online exchange programs differ based on their school year levels?" indicated minimal variation in commonly used words across different school year levels. However, when contrasting the characteristic words used by lower-year level respondents with those of upper-year level, distinct differences in viewpoints emerged. First- and second year respondents frequently expressed a desire to establish friendships with individuals from abroad, while third- and fourth year students tended to articulate more concrete notions about the experiences they could gain from the online exchange program. This trend may be attributed to their aspiration to broaden their global perspective and make the most of the remaining opportunities during their university years. Regarding academic credits, no variations in word use trends were identified across different academic year levels. Irrespective of their year level, respondents generally expressed a consistent interest in obtaining additional credits. These findings underscore the potential advantages of offering academic credits in the design of short-term online exchange programs.

While the findings of this study offer insights to educators and policymakers interested in implementing online exchange programs, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. These include the study's small number of participants and small corpus size, which may undermine the credibility of the conclusions. A larger dataset might have been necessary. The exclusive focus on English majors and the reliance on a convenience sampling method may constrain the generalizability of the results. Specifically, if non-English majors had been included in the study, a higher percentage of students might have chosen not to participate. Furthermore, the demand for academic credits as a condition for participation may have been more pronounced among non-English majors. Additionally, a more in-depth exploration of the reasons for the non-participation of six respondents through interviews could have been particularly beneficial for institutions seeking to increase participation rates in

such online projects. Another limitation is that the survey was conducted during the pandemic and was not compared with a post-pandemic survey when most study-abroad programs had returned to normal.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study elucidates respondents' attitudes toward online international exchange and the variations in attitudes based on school-year levels. Considering the high rate of respondents wishing to participate and the number of favorable comments without the mention of the COVID-19, the advantages of CALL-mediated international exchange programs may continue to be relevant and enhance the motivation of EFL learners, regardless of pandemic conditions.

Conclusion

While online language exchange programs cannot completely replace the immersive experience of study-abroad programs, this study's survey results suggest that EFL students majoring in English generally appreciate such projects. It is noteworthy that nearly half of those interested in participating (46%) stated that they would join the programs if they could earn credits, indicating a self-determined type of extrinsic motivation. Online projects often require students to manage their time more independently and acquire new technological skills, such as video conferencing and digital collaboration. By offering credits for online programs, students may become more engaged and responsible for their own learning.

Moreover, awarding credits can fairly validate the efforts of all participants, regardless of their initial motivation levels. This balance is necessary to enhance the overall success and participation rates in online projects. Additionally, some participants expressed concerns or a lack of confidence, regardless of their chosen answers and school-year levels. For these students, formal recognition of their participation can serve as an incentive to overcome their challenges.

The correspondence analysis revealed that respondents at all school-year levels were eager to practice speaking through short-term exchange programs. Respondents at lower-level years expressed interest in making friends through these programs, whereas those at higher-level years stated more concrete and practical reasons for joining the program. Students in upper-year levels can be expected to take leadership roles in such programs owing to the richness of their learning and higher education experiences. The analysis also displayed that all year-level respondents were equally hoping to receive credits after completion.

Although it is challenging to generalize the results of this study, the findings could help educational sectors plan, select, or combine such programs to enhance students' communication skills, cultural awareness, and motivation to learn English. There are several prospects for future studies on this theme. As the current study focused solely on short-term virtual exchange programs, future research could explore longer-term programs. Investigating the role of students' nationalities could be worthwhile, given the internationalization of

Japanese universities. Additionally, comparing the reactions of both genders in future studies would be valuable. Another important area for research would be examining how differences in English proficiency affect the outcomes of such programs. Furthermore, I plan to investigate the perspectives of EFL college students on online international exchanges in the current era, as studying abroad and international exchanges return to normal.

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Appendix A

Glossary of terms (excerpt)

得る, 取る：get / 会話, 対話, やりとり, 交流: interaction interacting / 国際交流: exchange /上達する, 上手くなる: improve / 〜がある(時間、単位など)：have (time, credits, etc.) / チャンス, 機会: opportunities, opportunity / 能力, 力: ability / モチベ、モチベーション、やる気がでる(になる、を出す)：motivate, motivated, motivating / 留学, 海外留学: study abroad

Appendix B

Reasons for choosing #1

1. I do not feel like doing it online.
2. I am not very confident in my English skills, but I want to participate because I am interested in interacting with various people.
3. I enjoy speaking with international students at this university, and I am satisfied with it. However, I think it is worth participating in such programs considering the current situation, in which we cannot study abroad.
4. As it is not a direct exchange, I am sure that I will not be proactive. If so, I do not think that there is much point in participating.
5. Considering this situation, online communication is becoming more mainstream, and it is easier to engage with people living in other countries. I am very interested in this kind of an exchange because speaking with people from other countries could help me in discovering many things that are different from, or the same as, my own country.
6. I sometimes find it difficult to convey what I want to say when I speak with a native speaker in an online classroom. It is easier to communicate face-to-face.

Reasons for choosing #2

7. It is meaningful.
8. There are limited opportunities to communicate with people overseas.

9. I will be able to interact with children from overseas when I get the credit, and it will motivate me.
10. I want to test my English ability and make friends from overseas and learn about other countries ' cultures.
11. I think it will be beneficial for me to speak with native English speakers, and I would like to participate as part of the class.
12. I am interested in it, but it is difficult for me to do it unless I am forced to.
13. It sounds fun.
14. I want to participate to get experience if I can obtain credits for it.
15. I am not confident enough in my English to actively participate, and I don't have the time.
16. I do not have enough credits; so, I do not have time for anything other than credit-related activities.
17. It will help me improve my English.
18. I have participated in an online international exchange program before and enjoyed it.
19. If I can get some credit, I will be more active in the program.
20. If I am too busy to earn credits, it will be difficult to participate, but I am interested in the program.
21. I think I can do my best without slacking off, if credits are at stake.
22. It takes courage to do something on my own, but I would like to do it if I have such an opportunity.
23. I think I can work seriously to earn credits. If I don't get the credit, I might get discouraged.
24. I can learn English and get credits.
25. I have an image that it is hard to have an interaction if it is online.
26. I am busy; so, I do not have time to do it just for something outside class.
27. I want to prioritize preparing for other classes that award credits.
28. I want to take this opportunity to interact and make friends with people from overseas.
29. I already have opportunities to talk to people in other countries.
30. I want to earn more credits.
31. I want to take more chances to communicate.
32. I need to get more knowledge.
33. We get credit and we can also learn many things about different countries.
34. We need to get credit and learn many things about different countries.
35. It depends on the content. It looks like fun.
36. I think that actually speaking English is the best way to improve my English.
37. I am not comfortable with the idea of online interaction. Of course, I think it is a good opportunity, but the mere fact that it is online makes me feel less motivated than in person. Also, in my experience, online interactions only end up being a one-time event. Therefore, I would like to participate even if I am busy if it is for credit.
38. I am still nervous about online interaction.

39. I can learn English while I am in Japan by interacting with overseas students online.
40. I will work hard in preparation and during the exchange to get a high score if I can get credits. Also, It 's a good way to practice speaking English by interacting online.
41. I think it 's good to be able to have international exchange easily and safely since it's hard to go abroad in this situation.
42. I need the number of credits to graduate.

Reasons for choosing #3

43. It is good for me.
44. I want to further improve my English.
45. I definitely want to participate.
46. I want to make friends overseas.
47. I want to participate because I am interested in interacting with various people.
48. I believe it will be good for me.
49. It will improve my English ability.
50. I want to be able to listen to native English speakers.
51. I want to increase my interaction with people abroad, even if it is a short time. I want to speak. I want to practice speaking.
52. I think I can become more motivated to learn English by interacting with overseas students.
53. I can get involved with people from overseas anytime, anywhere.
54. It is a valuable opportunity to interact with people from other countries even in Japan.
55. It was a valuable opportunity to interact with people from other countries without leaving Japan.
56. I want to make more friends al over the world.
57. Because it is online, I can meet people I have never had contact with before through the common language of English.
58. I think that if one does not take positive actions, one will be unable to improve one's English .
59. It is a good learning experience.
60. I think it will be fun and beneficial for me to be able to connect with people from other countries, as I am unable to go there because of the Coronavirus pandemic.
61. I think it is a very useful program for people who want to learn English during the Coronavirus pandemic, when it is not easy to study abroad.
62. It is a great way for me to acquire new perspectives and knowledge. Additionally, interacting with people overseas is a good way to increase output. I want to participate in such programs irrespective of credits availability.
63. I don't have many opportunities to use English in my daily life.
64. I thought that if credits are given, it might be difficult for those who are

not confident in English to participate. However, there are not many opportunities like this, so I wanted to participate. I thought it would be a good opportunity to study English and to meet other students.

65. I would like to do it if I have a chance, because it is not easy to do so and I like interacting with overseas students in English.
66. I want a place where I can test my skills because the places where I can interact have become fewer and fewer owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.
67. I can improve my English.
68. I want to broaden my perspective .
69. I think that I can improve my English skills the most by speaking with other people.
70. I want to learn about different countries' English accents .
71. We will be able to practice English with native people and with people outside our immediate circle
72. I am attracted to meeting new people.
73. I think it is a good way to improve my English skills.
74. I cannot speak English at all; so, I definitely want to learn English through such programs.
75. I think it will be a good opportunity to improve my communication skills.
76. Credits are not important. I just want to have opportunities to speak English.
77. I want to participate because I think that interacting with people from other countries, and listening to different people's opinions will benefit me and help me understand others. I have a strong desire to participate in any programs that will provide me with such opportunities.
78. I am interested. I would be able to continue if there are face-to-face days as well as online.
79. Japanese is my native language and I want to participate as much as possible wherever there are opportunities to speak English.
80. It sounds fun, but I am worried about my ability to speak English.
81. I want to participate in this program regardless of whether I can get credits or not because in a previous non-credit program, I made friends, and we are still connected.
82. I really want to try it out because it offers a rare opportunity, that I have never had before, of connecting with people from all over the world. It's a rare opportunity to connect with people from all over the world in a way I've never had before.