

# Students' Feelings about Learning English on Zoom and Face-to-Face Classes

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## Abstract

This paper looks to study sixty-six Japanese university students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2 English on both Zoom and face-to-face (F2F) classes. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, classes across the world moved to remote classes, often using a program called Zoom. All participants in this study have had experience taking classes F2F and on Zoom for two years from 2020 to the beginning of 2022. There were two groups studied in this research: fourth-year students (n=32) and third-year students (n=34). Fourth-year students had their first year of university F2F and Zoom classes in their second and third years. On the other hand, third-year students started their university life with Zoom classes and had moved to F2F English classes in their third year in 2022. As a result, this study looks to see if there is any difference in WTC patterns between the two groups. Additionally, this study looks to investigate how the students felt about their classes; specifically looking at their perceived merits and demerits of learning English on Zoom, as well as if they felt they could learn English just as well on Zoom as they could in F2F classes.

**Key Words:** Willingness to communicate (WTC), face-to-face (F2F), e-learning, L1, L2, anxiety

## Literature Review

### About Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

The first WTC construct originated from Burgoon (1976) and was first described as "Unwillingness to Communicate." This construct discusses several sociological and psychological variables in which speakers would be unwilling to speak, which include self-esteem, alienation, introversion, and apprehension reticence. Mortensen, Arnston, and Lustig (1977) expanded further on this concept with their own model which they named "Predisposition Toward Verbal Behavior." This model, while it mentions the constraints of individuals' willingness or unwillingness to speak in given situations, could not determine any causes for the behavior. McCroskey and Richmond (1982) explored one of the causes for communicative behavior is in individuals' "shyness," and a follow-up study by McCroskey and Baer (1985) developed the "Willingness to Communicate" construct as it relates to the first language (L1).

Mortensen et al. (1977), and McCroskey and Baer (1985) all proposed that WTC is a trait-like predisposition that remains stable across all situations. It was later proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) that WTC is not a trait-like factor, and that other situational contexts are also factors in WTC. However, research up until that point only considered communication in the L1. MacIntyre et al. (1998) defines

second language (L2) WTC as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2,” (p. 547). Henry, Thorsen, and MacIntyre (2021) state that important factors have a great impact on WTC and language use; for example, Clément, Baker, and MacIntyre (2003) state intergroup contact and Marton and Macintyre (2020) claim feedback from other language users as factors that impact L2 WTC. Regarding L2 language learning, researchers involved in the WTC construct (MacIntyre et al., 1998, 2003, Dornyei, 2005) all argue that “a fundamental goal of second language (L2) education should be the encouragement of learners’ WTC in the language process. As a result, the focus of the WTC construct began studies in the language classroom to determine some factors for L2 learners WTC behavior. Some factors identified include motivation (Hashimoto, 2002) and anxiety (Yashima, 2002, MacIntyre et al., 1998).

While it was argued in previous studies of WTC being a trait-like characteristic and by others as situational characteristic, Cao (2006) began addressing the gaps in existing research on this relationship between the two and employing them in the L2 classroom. Her research focused on ten learners who were learning English abroad. In this research, Cao collected data using questionnaires to measure trait WTC, and eight recorded classroom observations to measure situational WTC to determine the correlation between trait and situational WTC. Furthermore, Cao also used an interview in which students listened to their recordings and were asked what factors contributed to their WTC behavior. In Cao’s research, no clear correlation between the WTC reports could be determined across the group of participants using the observation scheme which was employed (p.485). However, some factors affecting WTC could be determined from the research. These included group size, self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor, interlocutor participation, degree of topic preparation, cultural backgrounds, and medium of communication, (p. 486).

### **Communication Problems Online Language Learning**

L2 WTC in the classroom has been studied in the past and researchers had originally looked at communication through in-person learning. However, there is also research which shows communication patterns can change whether participants are engaging in discourse through the Internet or in-person. Jucks, Paechter, and Tartar (2003) state:

Online discourse may differ from face-to-face discourse with regard to basic communication processes. In computer-mediated communication settings it can be more difficult to ensure a common ground of mutual understanding, as often established communication routines from face-to-face communication are not available. Hence, online discourse may suffer from insufficient group coordination or from deficiencies in the coherence of contributions, (p. 124).

As they mention, there are basics of F2F communication that can often go missing online, and as such, group tasks may be difficult for some participants. Researchers such as Davidson (2015 as cited in Gillett-Swann, 2017) have stated similar problems such as anxiety towards technology and their peers. Participants may feel inadequate in a group, or find it difficult to interact with their peers, (Gillett-Swann, 2017). However, Jucks et al. (2003) add that online learning could have the opposite effect for some learners, stating that some learners may be more willing to participate as they feel more anonymous as opposed to F2F classes, (p. 125). This can lead to more equal participation in some instances.

There are many issues when it comes to online learning, and peer-interaction is a common issue, and as mentioned in the literature, a problem that educators need to be wary of when using different online platforms for e-learning.

### **Zoom and Research on Language Learning through Zoom**

When it comes to e-learning programs being used, Zoom is one that has been used often at the time of this research. Zoom Video Communications, or Zoom for short, is a peer-to-peer software program that allows participants to hold video meetings, conferences, chats, and calls. Additionally, Zoom also has several useful functions, such as voice and message chat available to all participants, and the ability to separate participants into smaller groups with the “breakout room” function. The program saw a rise in usage as work and study needed to be shifted to online with the COVID-19 breakout which started in late 2019, as workers and students could not safely attend work or classes. Relating to education, many educators were using Zoom to be able to hold their classes from home, while students could also take them from home.

As many institutions have relied heavily on Zoom in the span of a couple years some research has been conducted and some issues have been identified. Moorhouse (2020) wrote that “group and whole-class discussions are characterized by longer silences and shorter student responses,” (p. 610). This comes as no surprise considering some of the previously mentioned issues with online learning. Additionally, Peachey (2017 as cited in Moorhouse 2020) mentioned that the ability to turn off one’s camera, hinders important communication cues, particularly paralinguistic communication, which is communication that exists outside of words, such as intonation, volume speed, gestures, and other non-verbal cues. There are other disadvantages such as technical issues; for example, poor Internet connection, unsuitable microphones and earphones, and being unable to find a quiet environment to take a class, (Lowenthal et al. 2020 as cited in Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021).

Naturally during the pandemic, many language learning classes also started using Zoom, and as a result there is some research on language learning over Zoom, albeit very limited. Before the pandemic, however, there were some researchers who studied the use of Zoom for e-learning purposes. Dharma, Asmarani, and Dewi (2017) compared the advantages and disadvantages of using different two different programs, Skype and Zoom, for teaching Japanese online. They looked mostly on the technical use of Zoom where most of the participants said it had clear audio (83%). Other notable reports were the smooth image quality (50%), and stable connection (67%), among others. Rahyu (2020) researched the attitudes of sixty-two English language learners using Zoom in Indonesia. Data was collected on a five-point likert scale questionnaire about their feelings towards Zoom. The results showed that most students strongly agreed (33.9%) or agreed (38.7%) that they could ask and answer the teacher’s questions. Additionally, many students strongly agreed (35.5%) or agreed (32.2%) that they could collaborate with their classmates when their teacher put them in a breakout room with a task. These results showed that students didn’t have any issues with these tasks when using Zoom. While most of the participants in this study showed positive feelings towards learning through Zoom, when asked to compare it to F2F classes, many students strongly agreed (43.5%) or agreed (32.2%) that F2F was preferable for communication in the classroom.

As can be seen in these two examples of research on language learning through Zoom classrooms, there are some positive factors, such as its ease-of-use and also many students found that it was good for communicating with their teachers and classmates, even for L2 language learning. On the other hand, some studies show that students will still prefer F2F if available.

### **Purpose of Study**

This research was conducted to further explore the use of Zoom for L2 English language learning. First, this study looked at the perceived WTC characteristics of English majors at a four-year women's university in Japan after having completed two years of language learning on Zoom. The study focuses on how their perceived WTC, particularly the factor of anxiety as mentioned in previous research (Yashima, 2002, MacIntyre et al., 1998), and how it may have been impacted depending on the time of implementation of Zoom classes; specifically on how hesitant they are to complete certain tasks in English if the class is on Zoom or if it is F2F. The fourth-year students at this university first experienced F2F English classes while they were in their first year and moved to Zoom following the COVID-19 pandemic during their second and third years. On the other hand, third-year students started university during the pandemic where their first two years of classes were online and have only taken F2F English classes from native English speakers in their third year. As a result, there may be differences in how active they are in their usage of English with their peers and with their teachers during F2F classes or online. Additionally, as learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has largely been done through Zoom by numerous institutions, there is not much research as to how students feel about learning English on Zoom as can be seen in the literature presented (Rahyu, 2020). Finally, this research also looks to investigate what students believe are the merits and demerits of English language learning on Zoom and if they feel their English ability can improve just as much online as they could on F2F classes.

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** How do English majors' perceived WTC differ between Zoom classes and F2F classes? Are there any differences between third-year and fourth-year students?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2):** What do students think are the merits and demerits of Zoom classes? Are there any differences between third-year and fourth-year students?

**Research Question 3 (RQ3) :** Do students think their English can improve just as much when taking Zoom classes as it can in F2F classes? Why or why do they think so? Are there any differences between third-year and fourth-year students?

### **Instrument**

To answer the previous research questions, a questionnaire was designed based on the common English tasks students need to complete in their English language classes to compare their hesitancy to speak in English in Zoom and in F2F classes. It was made in a 4-point likert where students were asked to read the sentence and circle the number that most corresponds to their feelings to the statement (1=Very hesitant; 2= Slightly hesitant; 3= Not very hesitant; 4= Not hesitant at all). Items 1 – 4 were about situations where they use English in Zoom classrooms. Items 5 – 8 were the same situations, but in F2F classes and with slight changes to 7 and 8. These items refers to speaking English during group work in

person, but statements 3 and 4 refer to group work in “breakout rooms” which is the function used for splitting participants into groups with their peers. Using this function, teachers may also enter breakout rooms if they wish, so there is opportunity for students and teachers to speak without every member of the class present. The questionnaire was delivered in Japanese but has been translated below. The items on the survey are as follows:

#### **Zoom Class Items**

1. Asking the native English teacher a question in English.
2. Answering the native English teacher's question in English.
3. Speaking in English with classmates during group work in breakout rooms.
4. Speaking in English to the native English teacher during group work in break out rooms.

#### **F2F Class Items**

5. Asking the native English teacher a question in English.
6. Answering the native English teacher's question in English.
7. Speaking in English with classmates during group work.
8. Speaking in English to the native English teacher during group work.

The questionnaire also includes an open-ended response section that includes three items to help answer RQ2 and RQ3. These items ask the students about the following:

9. What are the merits of English classes on Zoom?
10. What are the demerits of English classes on Zoom?
11. Can your English language ability improve just as much from Zoom classes as it can in F2F classes?

Additionally, a short semi-structured interview was given to students who volunteered. These questions mostly focused on their individual responses and asked students to get more detailed information about the results of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was first conducted during the last three weeks of the first semester of the 2022 academic year by paper, but an online version was given to some students who were unable to do it in-person. Following analysis of the questionnaires all students who were willing to participate in an interview were contacted and scheduled for an interview. The interview period lasted a total of three weeks. Some interviews were held through Zoom, while others were held in-person. It should be noted that the fourth-year students had completed their entire first year of classes in F2F classes, but at the time of this research, the third-year students had only experienced F2F English classes for one academic semester. As a result, it should be noted that there is a difference in length of experience with taking F2F English language classes from native English teachers between the group of fourth-year students and third-year students.

## Participants

The participants for this research were sixty-six English majors at a private women's university in Kobe (N=66). This university's English language department has students take English language courses taught by native English speakers from their first year to their third year. There were two different groups for this study, fourth-year students (n=32) and third-year students (n=34). As previously mentioned, fourth-year students had studied in F2F English classes with native English teachers in their first academic year, 2019. Due to the pandemic, they took their classes on Zoom from 2020 to early 2022. Third-year students (n=34) entered the university during this change to remote classes in 2020 and began their first F2F instruction from native English speakers in their third year, spring 2022.

## Results & Discussion

### Results of Questionnaire

The tables below show the findings of the questionnaire and will be further explained in the discussion section. The questionnaire was delivered in Japanese and students were allowed to answer all questions in Japanese. For this paper, the results have been translated into English. The items are grouped so that the differences between Zoom and F2F classes can be clearly compared (i.e., Item 1: Asking the teacher questions in English (Zoom) and Item 5: Asking the teacher questions in English (F2F) are grouped together). Table 1 first lists the results of fourth-year students (n=32) showing the mean, standard deviation, and distribution of student responses. Table 2 shows the results of third year students (n=34) in the same manner.

**Table 1:** Survey responses of fourth-year students (n = 32)

Q: How hesitant are you to do the following tasks?			Distribution of student responses			
Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Asking the native English teacher questions in English. (Zoom)	2.78	0.94	3	9	12	8
5. Asking the native English teacher questions in English. (F2F)	3	0.87	1	9	11	11
2. Answering the native English teacher's questions in English. (Zoom)	3.28	0.72	1	2	16	13
6. Answering the native English teacher's questions in English. (F2F)	3.31	0.78	1	3	13	15

3. Speaking in English with classmates during group work in break out rooms. (Zoom)	2.88	1.00	5	3	15	9
7. Speaking in English with classmates during group work. (F2F)	3.09	0.99	4	2	13	13
4. Speaking in English to the native English teacher during group work in break out rooms. (Zoom)	3.16	0.88	3	1	16	12
8. Speaking in English to the native English teacher during group work. (F2F)	3.28	0.81	2	1	15	14

Note: 1 = very hesitant; 2 = slightly hesitant; 3 = not very hesitant; 4 = not hesitant at all

**Table 2:** Survey responses of third-year students (n=34)

Q: How hesitant are you to do the following tasks?			Distribution of student responses			
Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Asking the teacher questions in English. (Zoom)	2.52	0.74	3	12	17	2
5. Asking the teacher questions in English. (F2F)	2.61	0.69	2	11	19	2
2. Answering the teacher's questions in English. (Zoom)	2.88	0.76	0	12	14	8
6. Answering the teacher's questions in English. (F2F)	2.97	0.79	0	11	13	10
3. Speaking in English with classmates during group work in break out rooms. (Zoom)	2.67	0.80	2	12	15	5
7. Speaking in English with classmates during group work. (F2F)	3.02	0.75	1	6	18	9
4. Speaking in English to the teacher during group work in break out rooms. (Zoom)	2.76	0.78	2	9	18	5
8. Speaking in English to the teacher during group work. (F2F)	2.91	0.75	1	8	18	7

Note: 1 = very hesitant; 2 = slightly hesitant; 3 = not very hesitant; 4 = not hesitant at all

The following four tables list the perceived merits and demerits of online classes for learning English on Zoom. They are separated into types of comments and some sample comments were translated from Japanese and added in. Table 3 shows the merits as perceived by fourth years and Table 4 list their perceived demerits. Table 5 lists the merits by third-year students (n=34) and Table 6 lists their demerits in the same format.

**Table 3:** Merits of Zoom classes from fourth year students (n=32)

9. What are the merits of Zoom classes?	
Sample comments about learning (10 comments)	“Power Points and other materials are easier to see because of screen sharing.” “Because I’m already online, it’s easier to search for vocabulary I don’t know.”
Sample comments about convenience (10 comments)	“I can take the class anywhere I want.” “I don’t have to worry about the time it takes to commute to university.”
Sample comments about communicating with the teacher (7 comments)	“It’s easier to ask questions with the chat function.” “It’s easier to ask questions in breakout rooms where there are less people.”
Sample comments about communicating with classmates (6 comments)	“I got the opportunity to talk to students I normally wouldn’t talk to.” “You can hear many people’s opinions.”
Other sample comments (2 comments)	“I can see everyone more easily online.” “We don’t have to wear masks online, so I can see people’s facial expressions, which I think is important.”

Note: Some students wrote more than one type of comment and some students did not answer.



**Table 4:** Demerits of Zoom classes from fourth-year students (n=32)

10. What are the demerits of Zoom classes?	
Sample comments about technical difficulties. (13 comments)	“Bad Internet connection makes the classes too difficult to take. “I often get logged out because of Internet connection.” “If a teacher shares a video, it’s impossible to comprehend by screen share.”
Sample comments about learning problems (10 comments)	“It often feels more like a lecture where the teacher just speaks.” “I can’t clearly hear the proper pronunciation online.”
Sample comments about communicating with classmates (6 comments)	“There are too many students who refuse to participate in group work.” “I don’t have a classmate next to me who I can ask questions to.”
Sample comments about communicating with the teacher (4 comments)	“It’s impossible to ask the teacher anything.” “During F2F classes, you can have small-talk with the teacher, but there are not many opportunities to do this online.”

Note: Some students wrote more than one type of comment and some students did not answer.

**Table 5:** Merits of Zoom classes from third-year students

9. What are the merits of Zoom classes?	
Sample comments about learning (8 comments)	“I think it’s easier to understand English through Zoom than F2F.” “Screen sharing makes the class materials easier to see.”
Sample comments about communicating with classmates (8 comments)	“It’s easier to share my opinion with others.” “It’s easier to talk on Zoom when you always have different partners.”
Sample comments about feelings towards English (8 comments)	“I don’t feel as nervous because I’m not speaking in front of everyone.” “I’m not confident in English, but I wasn’t that worried about it online.” “I can think more clearly, without worrying about how others view my English.”
Sample comments about convenience (4 comments)	“I could take the class from anywhere I wanted.” “There’s no need to go to school.”
Sample comments about communicating with the teacher (4 comments)	“You can use the chat to confirm things with the teacher.” “It’s easier to answer the teacher’s questions.”

Note: Some students wrote more than one type of comment and some students did not answer.

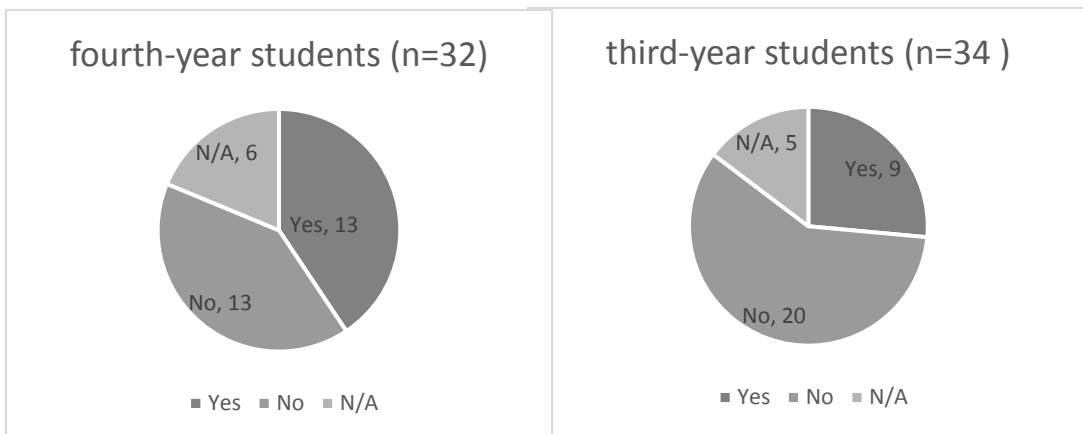
**Table 6:** Demerits of Zoom classes from third-year students

10. What are the demerits of Zoom classes?	
Sample comments about communicating with classmates (15 comments)	“I don’t think I can freely talk with anyone, so I just work alone.” “We won’t speak at all if the teacher isn’t there. It’s awkward.” “I don’t know when it’s appropriate for me to talk.”
Sample comments about technical difficulties (13 comments)	“It’s difficult to hear depending on the environment around you.” “If there is trouble with the Internet connection, I can’t understand the class.”
Sample comments about communicating with the teacher (8 comments)	“I don’t know when it’s ok to ask a question, so I don’t.” “I can’t ask the teacher anything directly.”
Sample comments about learning (3 comments)	“It’s easy to lose motivation on Zoom.” “I lose track of where we are in the textbook.” “There are no opportunities to use English.”

Note: Some students wrote more than one type of comment and some students did not answer.

The following are tables that show the results of item 11 of the questionnaire.

**Table 7:** Distribution of Answers to Item 11



Note: N/A refers to the number of students who did not answer the question or couldn’t clearly answer “yes” or “no”.

**Table 8:** Sample comments on why students chose “yes” or “no” for item 11

11. Can your English language ability improve just as much from Zoom classes as it can in F2F classes? (fourth-year students; n=32)	
Yes (13 / 32)	<p>“I have to put more effort into listening carefully.”</p> <p>“It’s easier to practice conversation in breakout rooms.”</p> <p>“As long as the class content is the same as F2F classes, and you are serious about learning, there is no difference.”</p> <p>“I get nervous in F2F, so I worried less on Zoom and could focus better.”</p> <p>“I was a lot more comfortable talking on Zoom than face-to-face.”</p>
No (13 / 32)	<p>“Because I’m already online, I can just search things like vocabulary or use translation applications easily instead of thinking.”</p> <p>“I find it more difficult to speak out loud and say my opinion.”</p> <p>“It’s just a class where teachers ask questions and students answer.”</p> <p>“It’s too difficult to concentrate on Zoom.”</p> <p>“You can’t clearly hear the correct pronunciation and intonation.”</p>
11. Can your English language ability improve just as much from Zoom classes as it can in F2F classes? (third-year students n=34)	
Yes (9 / 34)	<p>“It’s the same. You can talk whenever you want and ask questions whenever you want to.”</p> <p>“As long as there’s enough input and output, there isn’t any difference.”</p> <p>“If the student is motivated, there won’t be any difference.”</p>
No (20 / 34)	<p>“I don’t feel there is really any opportunity to speak English.”</p> <p>“It’s easier to talk with the teacher and get feedback F2F.”</p> <p>“It’s difficult to answer questions. I don’t feel comfortable asking a question online, so if I don’t understand, I just give up on trying to understand.”</p> <p>“Without direct communication, you won’t improve that much.”</p>

Note: Some students may have given no reason, multiple reasons, or did not answer the question entirely.

### Semi-structured Interview Responses

In total, five fourth-year students and two third-year students took the interview in Japanese. While several other questions were asked, the questions that provided more information to the research are listed below:

1. Why is it difficult to communicate with others on Zoom?
2. Can you explain in more detail why you answered “no” to number 11?
3. How would you describe your improvement or lack thereof in English after taking Zoom classes?

4. Do you think you would be better if you only took F2F classes?

Additionally, many of these students scored the same answer for the items whether it be Zoom or F2F. In this case, they would be asked if they felt if there was really no difference between the two situations. All participants mentioned there was no significant difference between completing the task over Zoom classes or in F2F in English.

The first question was made because a common trend among these group of students was a difference in questionnaire items 1-5 (Asking the native English teacher questions in English) and 3-7 (Speaking in English with classmates during group work). The responses differed depending on the year of the student, but all answers described that there was more of a technical issue than anything else. For example, several students said lag was an issue, and that they didn't know when it was appropriate to turn on their microphone and speak because of this. This was mostly regarding asking the teacher a question. One fourth-year student mentioned that you need to have a lot of "courage" to be able to talk to your microphone and speak, particularly if it's with every student listening (i.e. not in a breakout room). One fourth-year student perceived the teacher as having a hard time with Zoom, and because of this, believed it would trouble the teacher to ask questions. Regarding the difference between items 3-7, two third-year students both said that talking with their classmates in breakout rooms was difficult because they didn't meet in person yet, so it was awkward for them. On the other-hand, one fourth-year's results said it was easier to communicate online which was shown in her questionnaire. She mentioned that she's shy around a lot of people, so Zoom made it easier for her to talk with others. With this exception, all the students mentioned there was a hesitancy to speak in English with classmates, some more than others. For third-year students, that was mostly because they hadn't met their classmates, but for both third and fourth-year students they said the biggest issue was that if the teacher wasn't present there were always students who wouldn't speak at all, or only speak in Japanese. This shows that the lack of presence of a teacher, makes it difficult for them to speak in English. Three of the students made similar comments, that even if they wanted to speak in English, they couldn't because nobody else would and that they had to also speak in Japanese to fit in with the group. One fourth-year student mentioned that it was difficult in certain classes where her classmates were a bit shy, and that in breakout rooms, classmates would just do group assignments individually in silence. Comments like these where participants mention difficulty communicating with their peers online is consistent with Gillett-Swann (2017).

For the second interview question given, all but two fourth-year students wrote "no" to questionnaire item 11, and this was asked to get more detail on why they thought so. Three students responded that a major issue was that they didn't think their pronunciation and intonation could improve over Zoom. They felt that at times there were technical issues, or their surroundings made it difficult to hear the teacher clearly. For example, if they were taking classes at the campus computer lab, there may be nearby students who were making noise. Another student mentioned that they felt they needed to be able to see the teacher speaking so they can try to mimic them. The one fourth-year student who said she

could improve just as much mentioned that it was more comfortable on Zoom, and she worried more during F2F classes. With the change to Zoom she didn't have to think as much and could focus better.

Following the third question, many stated that their lack of improvement was due to being unable to hear clearly. Others stated that maybe in certain skills they could improve, but there were certain skills that couldn't. For example, one student said speech skills could not improve because there little to no need to memorize what you needed to say. According to this student, you could prepare your script and just read it off the script without anyone knowing for certain. One fourth-year student said listening may have become a little better, but there has been no improvement to her speaking as she stated there were not many opportunities to speak English. The same student mentioned that it was easy to just use the computer or smartphone to find vocabulary, so she felt her vocabulary didn't improve after taking Zoom classes.

Lastly, six out of seven participants said their English skills would be better if classes had always been F2F. This is no surprise considering most of them mentioned that they responded "no" to item 11. One fourth-year mentioned that she feels she got better from Zoom because she had to focus a lot more in Zoom classes. Also, she once again mentioned that she felt her hesitancy to towards English in her first year and believes that thanks to Zoom she became more confident. Despite this, she thinks she would have improved a little more if her second and third years were F2F but doesn't believe it would have been a significant improvement. On the other hand, all other students believed they would have improved a lot more if they had taken more F2F classes. One fourth-year student strongly felt that she couldn't learn at all in Zoom classes, and that even if she tried her hardest, there would be no significant improvement in her English.

## Discussion

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** How do English majors' perceived WTC differ between Zoom classes and F2F classes? Are there any differences between third-year and fourth-year students?

First, when looking at the data on Table 1, you can see that fourth-year students are overall not that hesitant when it comes to speaking in English for the given tasks whether that be F2F or on Zoom. Students generally said they were not very hesitant (3) or not hesitant at all (4) for the tasks. However, there were some results that did stand out. When it came to asking the native English teacher questions (items 1-5), both had a more even distribution of answers when compared to the other items with students choosing between slightly hesitant (2), not very hesitant (3), and not hesitant at all (4). In F2F classes, eleven fourth-year students said they were not very hesitant (34.3%) and another eleven answered not hesitant at all (34.3%). However, in Zoom classes, twelve students (37.5%) were not very hesitant to ask questions, and eight (25%) were not hesitant at all. In both instances, nine students (28.1%) selected slightly hesitant (2). For communication between students for group work on Zoom (item 3) and F2F (item 7), thirteen students answered that they were not very hesitant (40.6%) or not hesitant at all (40.6%) in F2F classes, which shows they have no real issues with working in groups. Still, group was shown to be

the most difficult task for F2F tasks. For item 3, fifteen students answered that they were not very hesitant (46.8%), but only nine (28.1%) said they were not hesitant at all. Similarly, to item 7, students responded that item 3 was the most difficult of the zoom tasks, with five students (15.6%) stating they were very hesitant. While generally, the students didn't perceive themselves as too hesitant in this task, it's worth noting that group work was most difficult with them, and this is consistent with the interview students' comments.

Next, Table 2 also shows that third-year students show a similar trend as students generally don't see many differences in their WTC whether it be through Zoom or F2F teaching and preferred F2F and students often chose 2 (slightly hesitant) or 3 (not very hesitant) when responding to the items. The margin of difference was also not large between items referring to Zoom classes and items referring to F2F classes, but the answers were sometimes more evenly distributed, particularly with the 2-6 pairing (Answering the teachers' questions in English) where there was a fairly even distribution between students choosing slightly hesitant (2), not very hesitant (3), and not hesitant at all (4) as their answer on either Zoom or F2F. Another noticeable trend was group work (items 3 and 7) where 79.4% of students preferred F2F by selecting either 2 or 3, while 70.5% selected 2 or 3 for Zoom courses. Also, nine students said they were not hesitant at all in group work for F2F, and only five selected the same answer for Zoom. This is a clear indication they feel they are less hesitant in group work if it's in person. This is further supported, by item 10, where third-year students chose communicating with other students as the biggest demerit of Zoom classes. Interestingly, not many students answered that they were very hesitant to item 3 (5.8%) and item 7 (2.9%).

In comparing the perceived communication patterns on fourth-year students and third-year students there is a clear difference in how willing they are to do the tasks in English. Overall, fourth-year students showed less hesitancy than third-year students. The overall score in every task showed fourth-year students were less hesitant about speaking English than third-year students whether that be on Zoom or in F2F classes. With the exception of the 1-5 item pairs which showed a more even distribution, fourth-years generally chose 3 and 4 at a high rate. Comparatively, third-years showed more of a tendency to answer 2 and 3, but showed more variance with their answers, as 4 was still selected often as well. Additionally, both groups reported that asking the teacher a question on Zoom as something they were most hesitant to do, which was also mentioned in the interview. Consistent with Gillett-Swann (2017), both groups also stated communicating with students to be difficult. This was further supported when the looking at the tables on demerits of Zoom classes (see Tables 4 and 6). This more is noticeable when looking at the comments by the third-years on Table 6. Additionally, while not many students participated in the semi-structured interview, the interview did show that students were hesitant and didn't believe there was a need to use English in certain situations on Zoom, particularly with the absence of a teacher. Furthermore, they found it difficult to know when it was their turn to speak whether it be with the teacher or with classmates, which helps explain the questionnaire results. An interesting contrast was that more fourth-years answered that they were very hesitant to do group work in English than third year students.

While this answer was not chosen often, it was still an unexpected result. Lastly, technical issues of Zoom and problems such as Wi-Fi connection, which was commonly listed as a demerit of Zoom classes, could lead to their overall hesitancy to use English in Zoom class settings as some students commented that issues like lag, made it difficult to know when it was appropriate to talk.

In short, RQ1 can be answered that generally both fourth-year and third-year students as groups showed higher perceived WTC patterns during F2F classes than they did in Zoom. Comparing the two groups, you can clearly see a difference in their perceived WTC as well, which showed that fourth-year students were less hesitant towards every item listed when compared to third-year students. Of course, there were some exceptions to this, as one fourth-year interviewee displayed in her questionnaire and interview results that she felt less anxiety online, which was mentioned as a possibility in previous research by Jucks et al. (2003). Although, the comparisons are quite clear that fourth-years feel less anxiety, there is nothing in the data to show that this is an effect of having experienced F2F classes earlier and at a longer time. Still, it is likely to have played some factor as third-year students clearly show more hesitancy towards speaking English in the class.

**Research Question 2 (RQ2):** What do students think are the merits and demerits of Zoom classes? Are there any differences between third-year and fourth-year students?

This question was largely answered by questionnaire items 9 – 10 and are also supported by interview responses. For full details see Tables 3 – 6. Both groups largely made the same comments, but the frequency of the comments differed between groups. When it came to merits, both mentioned parts of the learning process, particularly the ability to share materials through Zoom's screen share made it easier to follow classes. Some also mentioned, that being online during class, made it easy to search unfamiliar words with online dictionaries since they were already on the Internet. Still, one fourth-year student did mention that was a demerit of Zoom during the interview, mentioning that there was no need to think, as answers could easily be searched online. Another merit mentioned was convenience, mostly regarding the ability to learn from home. Comments on this were more common with fourth-years than with third-years. Fourth-years reported communication between the teacher was easier by using chat functions and communication with students was better because they could talk to many different people. Similarly, third-year students said it was good to talk to many different students. Despite this, communication between students was also mentioned as a large demerit of Zoom, as some fourth-years mentioned both in the questionnaire and the interviews that there were students who were difficult to work with and third-years also stating that even during group work students just work individually when the teacher is not present. Furthermore, third-year students found it equally difficult to talk with the teacher or knowing when it's appropriate to speak. This is similar to a comment made by one fourth-year student during the interview. In other words, a common trend in this research is that what may be a merit for some students, is a demerit for others. As for demerits, one of the main problems mentioned by both groups were technical difficulties. These were mostly comments on how students perceived the class to be too difficult to comprehend if the

Internet connection was bad. During the interview, some students also mentioned that they believed bad Wi-Fi connection on Zoom made it too difficult to listen to the teacher's intonation and pronunciation. This is also consistent with Peachey (2017 as cited in Moorhouse 2020) which stated that these are important things learners often think are lost in online language classes.

As can be seen, there are many similarities between the two groups. Although it still can't be determined by this research, third-year students mentioning communication problems with others more often than others, may suggest that fourth-years perceived WTC may be higher because they had finished one year of F2F learning where they could meet their teachers and classmates, and thus have more comfortable relationships with others than the third-year students who started university completely online.

**Research Question 3 (RQ3) :** Do students think their English can improve just as much taking Zoom classes as it can F2F classes? Why or why do they think so? Are there any differences between third-year and fourth-year students?

Tables 7 and 8 and some parts of the interview help answer this question. In the case of fourth-years, thirteen students answered "yes" and thirteen answered "no". Another six were not sure or didn't answer the question. The most common reasoning for students answering "yes" was that if the content was the same, you should be able to learn as much. Furthermore, many students answered that if a student is serious about studying, there should be no difference. Lastly, some students answered that they had to put more effort into learning on Zoom because it has some technical issues as previously mentioned and as a result, learned more. This shows that some students will put more effort into Zoom classes because they perceive it to have limitations. Students who answered "no" mentioned that there were not many opportunities to use English. For example, they felt the class resembled more of a lecture style or a class where students just answer teacher's questions which they think is far different when compared to a F2F class where students can speak more freely. As mentioned previously, a student mentioned being online made it easy to use tools like translation or dictionaries, so she didn't believe there was a reason to try.

Third-years on the other hand answered "no" at a much higher rate as twenty students selected that answer, and only nine students selected "yes". The remaining students didn't answer or didn't know. Students answering "yes" gave similar answers as the fourth-year students (i.e. it depends on the students' effort; no difference as long as the content is the same). Many students answered "no" stating there was not enough opportunities to use English on Zoom. Also, students mentioned communication with others to be problematic. When it came to the teacher, they felt it was hard to interact with them and also get useful feedback from them on Zoom.

To summarize, there's a difference between the fourth-years and third-years in response to this question. In total, twenty-two students answered "yes" and thirty-three students answered "no". The overall reasoning behind their answers didn't vary significantly, especially for those who answered "yes". There was slight differences for students answering "no", but generally students perceived there to be issues with communication which is similar to previous research on learning languages online.



### **Limitations**

There are several notable limitations of this research. A noticeable one is that it includes questionnaires and interviews, but not classroom observations done in previous research like the study by Cao in 2006. In other words, this study focuses on students perceived WTC, but not their observable patterns in WTC. Time was also a factor in this study. As mentioned earlier, fourth-year students had completed one year of F2F classes. When the questionnaire was delivered, the third-year group were about to complete their first semester of F2F teaching. While it's unclear if this would affect their results or not, it can't be ignored that one group had more experience with F2F classes than another group, and it is possible that their results could be different if they finished a full year like the fourth-year group. It could be argued that the two groups are not entirely comparable because of this. Furthermore, this study does not consider that there are several native English teachers at this university and this research treats them and all their classes as being the same. As teachers, have their own teaching styles, it's likely that some teachers were better at making a more communicative environment on Zoom or F2F than other teachers. As a result, the answers given by the students, cannot be considered balanced, as they all have individual experiences with several different English language classes. Finally, the number of participants for the interview was considerably smaller than the number of students for actual participants. While the interviewees gave some insight into their responses, it's still not enough information to make a serious impact on the overall study.

### **Implications**

While there are many limitations to the study, it can provide L2 educators with some insight into how students feel about classes held remotely, whether that be on Zoom or some other platform. While it wasn't a large difference, students did perceive themselves to be more willing to speak with others in L2 English in F2F classes than online. As this study looks at Japanese learners, educators in Japan may need to consider that many students feel anxiety towards speaking L2 English with the teacher and classmates online more so than in person. In particular, Zoom's breakout rooms are difficult for students. The study suggests that teachers need to play an active role in monitoring students during group work and encourage them to speak more even if they are not present. Teachers also need to be careful to ensure that students have enough opportunities to speak, as several students mentioned not having enough opportunities to speak or feeling discomfort in having to ask teacher's questions in their L2. If remote classes continue in the future, all of these are things L2 educators need to think about to make a truly communicative classroom where students are not hesitant to use their English freely and confidently. Teachers should also be more careful with students who are new to language learning. As was seen in the results, fourth-year students were a little bit more open to Zoom classes and there were more students who felt they could learn as much on Zoom as they can in F2F classes. However, in comparison, many third-year students started their university language learning on Zoom and are now more hesitant to use English and more of

them feel it's not likely they can learn English well on Zoom. Although this study could not show that when Zoom was introduced to the two groups was the major factor for their hesitancy, it may play some factor in their feelings towards using L2 English in the classroom. While it can be argued that these students were hesitant to use English because of having to move to online during the COVID-19, and as the pandemic settles and classes move towards F2F environments, this will not be such a problem. However, should teachers have online classes in the future, there's enough research on online classes to show that students are generally more hesitant to use an L2 online, and they need to take learner anxiety into account.

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire

ネイティブの先生による Zoom での授業に関しておたずねします。1 から 4 の項目について、あなたの気持ちに近いものを一つ選んでください。

1 = かなり抵抗がある      2 = 少し抵抗がある      3 = あまり抵抗がない      4 = 全く抵抗がない

Zoom 授業中に					
1	ネイティブの先生に英語で質問をすること。	1	2	3	4
2	ネイティブの先生の質問に英語で答えること。	1	2	3	4
3	グループワークの時にブレイクアウト ルームで他の学生と英語で話すこと。	1	2	3	4
4	グループワークの時にブレイクアウト ルームでネイティブの先生と英語で話すこと。	1	2	3	4

ネイティブの先生による対面授業に関しておたずねします。5 から 8 の項目について、あなたの気持ちに近いものを一つ選んでください。

1 = かなり抵抗がある      2 = 少し抵抗がある      3 = あまり抵抗がない      4 = 全く抵抗がない

対面授業授業中に					
5	ネイティブの先生に英語で質問をすること。	1	2	3	4
6	ネイティブの先生の質問を英語に答えること。	1	2	3	4
7	グループワークの時に他の学生と英語で話すこと。	1	2	3	4
8	グループワークの時にネイティブの先生と英語で話すこと。	1	2	3	4

9～11の問に関して、あなたのご意見をお知らせください。

9. Zoom の英語の授業のメリットは何ですか？

10. Zoom の英語の授業のデメリットは何ですか？

11. Zoom の授業で対面授業と同じように英語力が伸ばせると思いますか？なぜそう思いますか？

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