

Camera Shy: Why Japanese Students Turn Off Their Cameras During Online Classes

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カメラ嫌い： 日本人学生がオンライン授業でカメラをオフにする理由

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The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many schools and universities to move their classes online. Zoom and other videoconferencing technologies have therefore been adopted as a way of connecting students and instructors and increasing class interaction. However, the switch to online learning has given rise to a number of new problems. One challenge has been students' reluctance to turn on their webcams during synchronous classes. A survey conducted by Castelli and Sarvary (2021) at Cornell University indicated that the main reason for students switching their cameras off was a concern about personal appearance. Other common reasons included a weak internet connection, concerns about other people and physical locations being visible in the background, and social norms. The present study is a partial replication of Castelli and Sarvary's (2021) work. The study was conducted in 2021 with a sample of 91 Japanese undergraduate students. The results suggest that adherence to social norms is the most important factor influencing students' decisions regarding the use of webcams. The author places the findings in a Japanese cultural context and provides suggestions on how to promote camera use in online classes.

Keywords: online learning, remote instruction, synchronous classes, webcams, videoconferencing, Zoom, group conformity

COVID-19（新型コロナウイルス）のパンデミックにより、多くの学校や大学では授業をオンラインで行うことを余儀なくされた。学生と講師をつないで対話型の授業にするZoomなどのビデオ会議のテクノロジーが採用されてはいるが、オンライン授業への切り替えにはこれまでにない問題が多々あった。その1つが、同期授業中にウェブカメラをオンにしたがらない学生がいるという問題であった。CastelliとSarvary (2021) がコーネル大学で行った調査によると、学生がカメラをオフにする主な理由は、自分の見栄えを気にしていたためであった。その他の理由として多かったものは、インターネット接続の不安定さ、自分以外の人物や物理的な位置を示すものの背景への映り込みに対する懸念、社会通念などが挙げられた。本研究は、CastelliとSarvaryの研究（2021）を部分的に模したものである。この研究は2021年に日本人大学生91名を対象に行われた。その結果、ウェブカメラの使用に関する学生の意思決定において最も重要な因子は社会通念であることが判明した。本研究では、調査結果を日本の文化的背景の中で提起し、オンライン授業でカメラの使用を促す方法を提案する。

キーワード：オンライン学習、遠隔指示、同期授業、ウェブカメラ、ビデオ会議、Zoom、集団同調性

Introduction

Computers and faster networks have made online learning a feasible educational option; the COVID-19 pandemic has made it an inevitable necessity. The shift was abrupt and posed numerous challenges for institutions and instructors as they struggled to adapt traditional on-campus programmes to the new virtual environment. Classes were (and still are) delivered in different modes — as pre-recorded lectures, live-streamed lessons, or using videoconferencing technologies.

Videoconferencing is a communication medium that allows users in different locations to make video and audio transmissions in real time. Earlier studies suggest that synchronous online learning offers

several advantages over asynchronous virtual learning environments. These include greater flexibility, increased interaction between the teacher and the students (and the students themselves), the provision of student-centred learning experiences, more opportunities for collaborative learning, and timely and constructive feedback (Racheva, 2018). Social aspects of synchronous learning have been especially emphasized in the literature. One of the main limitations of asynchronous online programmes is the sense of isolation that results from physical and temporal separation from instructors and other students (Croft, Dalton, & Grant, 2010). Synchronous learning can foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of loneliness. Gedera (2014) reported that students enrolled on a synchronous course recognized the value of physical clues in online communication and that two-way video and audio communication created a sense of belonging to a learning community. Muilenburg and Berge (2005) identified a strong correlation between social interaction and online learning effectiveness, students' enjoyment, and the likelihood they will continue with online education.

Some studies suggest that synchronous online learning also has advantages over a traditional classroom. For instance, Chen et al. (2015) observed that during synchronous virtual lessons, learners were more likely to greet each other, ask questions about the tasks, ask for or offer help, and reflect on content than they were in a physical classroom. In Racheva's (2018) survey of 64 teachers, school principals, and researchers with experience in remote teaching, the

respondents felt that a synchronous virtual learning environment offered a more personalized learning experience, greater freedom for students to share their opinions, and more focused and immediate feedback in comparison to face-to-face teaching.

Given the potential benefits of real time instruction, at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic a large number of instructors opted for this mode of learning to increase students' interaction, motivation, and the overall quality of the learning experience. However, they were surprised to discover that many students shied away from turning on their cameras during synchronous online classes. This phenomenon was observed globally and sparked an ongoing debate over whether students should be required to turn on their cameras.

One obvious benefit of having cameras on during online classes is that it increases the availability of nonverbal cues. Nonverbal communication is believed to constitute two-thirds of all communications (Hogan & Stubbs, 2003) and the inability to transmit nonverbal cues can have a negative impact on interpersonal communication (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Eye-contact is an essential part of human interaction (Zeki, 2009). In classroom contexts, eye-contact holds students' attention (Snyder, 1998) and projects teachers' confidence (Gower & Walters, 1983). Drawing on the results of earlier research, Castelli and Sarvary (2021, pp. 2-3) summarized the benefits of nonverbal cues as follows: "Instructors benefit from receiving nonverbal cues from their students such as smiles, frowns,

head nods, looks of confusion, and looks of boredom, so that they can evaluate their teaching in real time and adjust accordingly to improve student learning”. Nonverbal behaviours that reduce distance between teachers and students such as eye contact, a relaxed body posture, and smiling were found to improve students’ motivation and attitudes to a course (Anderson, 1979). Mottet (2000) reported a positive correlation between students’ nonverbal responsiveness and teachers’ satisfaction and their attitudes to distance teaching. Furthermore, several instructors found it uncomfortable and disheartening not to see the students (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021; Reed, 2020).

Nonverbal cues benefit not only the teachers but also the students, and some students are aware of this. McBrien, Jones and Cheng (2009) reported that some students in their study felt that a lack of nonverbal clues diminished their educational experience in the virtual classroom. Writing for *Baron News*, the online publication of Fountain Valley High School, Cate Meister stated that in addition to sending teachers a message that students were engaged, cameras can help build a sense of community and impel students to focus in class (Meister, 2020). Furthermore, Joe Marshall, writing for *Epigram*, Bristol University’s independent student newspaper, observed that when students turned their cameras off, the only connection they had with other students was their “name superimposed on a black screen and their voice every now and then, creating an unresponsive, unengaging — and not value-for-money — learning environment” (Marshall, 2021, ¶ 8).

By contrast, opponents argue that mandatory camera use violates students' privacy and can be an impediment to learning. Finders and Muñoz (2021) view the 'Cameras On' rule as "culturally insensitive and ultimately racist, sexist, gendered and classist". They point out that cameras intrude into the privacy of students' homes, which may be particularly uncomfortable for minority students and those from disadvantaged economic backgrounds. Female students are more likely to feel discomfort as they may feel under pressure to look 'camera ready'. Finders and Muñoz (2021) see the insistence on camera use as symptomatic of teachers' unfounded assumption that students must be 'under surveillance' at all times. They question the belief that turning cameras on indicates engagement with classwork. They also point out that pressure to turn on their cameras may increase students' anxiety and consequently have a negative effect on their learning performance. In a *New York Times* article with the expressive title "Why Zoom is terrible", Kate Murthy contends that the distortions and delays inherent in video communication contribute to feelings of isolation and anxiety (Murphy, 2020). Marquart and Russell (2020) believe that constantly being on camera can make students feel they need to perform for the instructor, making them more self-conscious about their looks and less engaged with the content. Similar observations are made by Moses (2020), who argues that feeling 'everyone is watching' and the perceived proximity of the faces on the screen may lead to discomfort and trigger the body's 'flight or fight' response, making students nervous and unable to concentrate.

Given the potential benefits of non-verbal cues and negative attitudes towards mandatory camera use in the media and some academic circles, it is essential to delve deeper into the reasons for students' reluctance to turn on their cameras during online classes. In the spring of 2020, Cornell University professors Frank Castelli and Mark Sarvary conducted a study of 276 undergraduate students majoring in biological sciences. The survey presented the participants with 11 pre-hypothesized reasons as to why students turn their cameras off during Zoom meetings and asked them to check all that applied to them. The reasons were as follows:

1. *I was concerned about my appearance.*
2. *I was concerned about other people being seen behind me.*
3. *I felt like everyone was looking at me the whole time.*
4. *I was concerned about my physical location being seen behind me.*
5. *I was concerned about distracting my classmates.*
6. *I was concerned about distracting my lab instructor.*
7. *I didn't want to be seen not paying attention.*
8. *I didn't want to be seen walking away from my computer.*
9. *I didn't want to be seen doing other things on the computer.*
10. *My webcam was not working.*
11. *My internet connection was weak.* (Casteli & Sarvary, 2021)

Two additional options were "Other", where students could add other reasons that were not anticipated a priori and "Not applicable—I always had my camera on". Responses were broken down by

demographic categories (minority vs non-minority students), gender, and the length of university study (freshmen vs non-freshmen).

For all groups, the most frequently reported reasons were personal appearance and concerns about other people or physical locations being visible in the background. A weak internet connection was also a common problem, especially among underrepresented minorities and female students. The responses in the category of “Other” highlighted the importance of social norms—students were less likely to turn on their cameras when other students had their cameras off.

Understanding the motives underpinning students’ decisions to turn off their web cameras represents the first step in developing strategies to promote their use. While some concerns may be shared, others are likely to vary from context to context. The present study aimed to examine the factors that make Japanese college students shy away from cameras during synchronous online classes.

Present study

The study was conducted in April 2021 with a sample of 2nd ~ 4th year undergraduate students majoring in English language and literature. All students in the English Department experienced some real time online lessons during 2020. Because the Japanese academic year begins in April, freshmen were not included in the survey.

The study was designed as a partial replication of Castelli’s and

Sarvary's (2021) work. While the hypotheses from the original study were preserved, some modifications were made to the layout and vocabulary.

The survey was anonymous and voluntary. It consisted of six questions. Questions 1-3 elicited data on year level, gender, and past attitudes towards web camera use during online classes. (The students were asked to indicate whether they had their cameras on *always, sometimes, or never.*)

In question 4, students were asked to report the reasons why they kept their cameras off. In addition to the 11 reasons hypothesized by Castelli and Sarvary (2021), an additional option 'Other students kept their cameras off, so I did not want to stand out' was added. In Castelli's and Sarvary's (2021) survey, 52.8% of the students who wrote comments in the 'Other' category reported social norms as the reason for not turning their cameras on. Traditionally, Japanese society places a strong emphasis on group conformity, and most Japanese do not want to stand out from their peers (Lipset, 1993). Therefore, it was hypothesized that group behaviour would have a strong impact on students' decisions regarding camera use. In two of the options, the vocabulary was slightly modified to enhance comprehensibility. Specifically, in option 4 'physical location' was replaced with 'my room' while in option 6 'my lab instructor' was replaced with 'my teacher'. Like the original study, there was also an option of 'Other' with space for students to enter reasons that had not been anticipated by the researcher.

In question 5, students were asked to indicate *the most important reason* for not turning on their cameras, while in question 6 they were given the opportunity to freely comment on camera use in online classes, with an option to write their responses in Japanese. A sample of the complete survey is available in the Appendix.

The survey was constructed using Google Forms and delivered via the university LMS platform. The responses were analysed with respect to gender and year level.

Results

Attitudes towards camera use

From a total of 332 non-freshmen students enrolled in the English Department in the spring of 2021, 91 responses were collected (27 sophomores, 25 juniors and 39 seniors). The gender ratio was equal (46 females to 45 male students). Eighteen students (19.8%) reported always having their cameras turned on, sixty-two students (68.1%) had their cameras on sometimes and 11 students (12.1%) said they had never turned their cameras on. By grade and gender, camera usage patterns were as follows:

Table 1. Camera use frequency by grade and gender

Camera use frequency	2 nd grade (n=27)			3 rd grade (n=25)			4 th grade (n=39)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Always	11	6	5	2	1	1	5	4	1
Sometimes	14	3	11	20	13	7	28	14	14
Never	2	1	1	3	1	2	6	2	4

Concerns about camera use

Eighty-four students responded to question 4, which asked them to give the reasons as to why they turn off their cameras during online classes. This means that even students who always participated in classes with their cameras on had some concerns about their use. Table 2 provides a breakdown of students' responses.

Table 2. Reasons why students do not turn their cameras on during online classes

Reasons for turning off camera	Total (n= 84)	Male (n= 42)	Female (n = 42)
Other students kept their cameras off, so I did not want to stand out.	64 (76.2%)	28	36
I was concerned about my appearance.	42 (50%)	16	26
I felt like everybody was looking at me the whole time.	31 (36.9%)	16	15
I was concerned about my room being seen behind me.	23 (27.4%)	10	13
I was concerned about other people being seen behind me.	22 (26.2%)	13	9
My internet connection was weak.	15 (17.9%)	8	7
I didn't want to be seen not paying attention.	15 (17.9%)	10	5
I didn't want to be seen doing other things on the computer.	10 (11.9%)	6	4
I didn't want to be seen walking away from my computer.	8 (9.5%)	5	3
I was concerned about distracting my classmates.	8 (9.5%)	3	5
My webcam was not working.	6 (7.1%)	4	2
I was concerned about distracting my teacher.	3 (3.6%)	1	2
Other: Our teacher told us to turn off our cameras.	2 (2.4%)	1	1

Among both male and female students, the most common reason for turning off the camera was conformity to group norms. In effect, students were reluctant to turn their cameras on when other students had their cameras off.

The second biggest reason for both genders was appearance, although female students seemed to be more concerned about their looks than

male students. Having their rooms or family members appear on the screen also ranked high on the list of concerns of both genders. In addition, approximately 25% of the students had their cameras turned off due to problems with equipment or a weak internet connection.

The survey also revealed that some students declined to turn their cameras on because they did not want to be seen doing other things at home or on the computer or simply not paying attention. This tendency was stronger among male students.

Among 11 students who always had their cameras on but nevertheless answered question 4, the most reported concern was the feeling they were being looked at the whole time (7 students). Other reasons included discomfort about family members being visible on the screen (5 students), concerns about appearance (4 students), problems with internet connection (4 students), problems with webcams (2 students), and a concern that they might be distracting others (2 students).

Main concerns

In question 5, students were asked to state the most important reason for turning off their cameras. Sixty-four students responded to this question. The results indicated that for most students, the decision was related to the perceptions of group norms—as many as 27 students (42.2%) said they kept their cameras off because other students did so.

The second most important reason was appearance, reported as the biggest concern by 21 students (32.3%). Most students responded with just one word —appearance— or said they did not feel comfortable about their faces showing on the screen. Four students explicitly stated that they felt embarrassed or inferior about the way they looked. There were also three students who simply disliked the idea of having to put on make-up and look “camera ready”.

For some students the main reason for turning off their cameras was the perceived distraction of the video panels. Four students felt that if they turned their cameras on, everybody would be looking at them the whole time. Two students felt they could concentrate more and study better when they turned their cameras off.

Other key concerns included discomfort about private spaces being visible in the background (4 students), problems with their cameras or internet connection (4 students), and being instructed by the teacher to keep cameras off (2 students).

Additional comments on camera use

Question 6 gave students an opportunity to make additional comments on camera use in online classes. Only 14 students answered this question. Some students provided more details about their concerns which included feeling they are being watched, dislike of a close-up view of their faces when speaking, perceived intrusion of their private spaces, and problems with their internet connection. One student felt

that turning on cameras was not necessary as their use was not linked to grades or attendance. Some students gave very personal responses. One student wanted to have his camera off so he did not have to wash his face and shave; another student talked about moving to a new apartment and problems with her internet connection.

However, there were also students who expressed positive attitudes toward camera use. One student said that he did not mind turning his camera on but did not want to stand out. He added that if the teacher had instructed the students to turn on their cameras, he would gladly have done so. Another student emphasized the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the students and the students themselves, stating that in some classes turning on the camera was comfortable while in others it was not. Finally, one student felt that having the camera on made him a bit anxious, but also motivated him to prepare better for the classes. He also added that if cameras were used only for a portion of the class, such as during presentations, students could communicate with their family members in advance and ask not to be disturbed.

Discussion

The present survey examined the reasons as to why Japanese college students might be reluctant to turn on their webcams during synchronous classes. As discussed previously, non-verbal cues play an essential role in human communication. It was hoped that by understanding the motivation underpinning students' behaviour,

instructors will be able to respond to students' concerns more adequately and promote more positive attitudes towards webcam use in online classes.

The results of the survey revealed that the most common reason Japanese college students gave for declining to turn on their cameras was group conformity; the students were reluctant to turn their cameras on when their peers had their cameras switched off.

Conformity can be defined as "the act of changing one's behavior to match the responses of others" (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004, p. 606). It is one of the key social norms and plays an important role in regulating human conduct. Compliance with group norms helps maintain social cohesion and ensures groups and societies can function smoothly and predictably. Individuals who follow the norms are rewarded through social approval; those whose behaviour is deviant from the norm are penalized through social rejection (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988).

Individuals altering their behaviour to fit into a group is a phenomenon that can be observed in all societies, although the propensity to conform may differ from culture to culture. For example, Kim and Markus (1999) observed that while nonconformity can be seen as uniqueness in Western cultures, it represents deviance in East Asian cultures.

Japan is a collectivist culture and Japanese society traditionally places a strong emphasis on social cohesion and group conformity. Japanese people do not want to stand out in a group and failure to abide by social norms is often met with social disapproval. A traditional Japanese saying, 'the nail that sticks out gets hammered down', captures that spirit. No student wants to be that nail.

However, an understanding of the psychological principles of conformity can be utilized to shape students' behaviour and bring about a positive change. In a discussion of the roles that norms play in human behaviour Cialdini, Kallgren and Reno (1991) make a distinction between descriptive and injunctive norms. The former refers to perceptions as to which behaviours are typically performed, in other words, what most people would do in the given situation. Injunctive norms denote perceptions as to which patterns of behaviour elicit approval or disapproval from other members of the social group. Descriptive norms are based on observations of other people's overt behaviours, while injunctive norms are formed based on the inferences of other people's judgment of a behaviour as right or wrong. Students declining to turn on their camera because other students have their cameras off provides a clear example of the descriptive norm effect. Therefore, to alter the behaviour of the group, a critical mass of students with cameras on is needed. That change could be brought about through an explicit discussion of the benefits of camera use. Students should be made aware of the importance of nonverbal cues in personal interaction. They should understand that being able to see

their peers during classroom activities will make communication feel more natural and reduce the feeling of isolation that may arise from physical separation. Furthermore, they should be aware that their camera practices may have an impact on the outcomes of their efforts. Compared to the traditional classroom, online learning requires more self-discipline and motivation. While some students are comfortable studying alone, others may find it difficult to sustain their motivation. These learners need peer support to succeed. If cameras are turned off and students never show their faces, it is much harder for them to connect to each other and provide mutual support and encouragement. On the other hand, switching cameras on promotes bonding and a sense of belonging to a learning community, which Bernard, Rojo de Rubalcava and St-Pierre (2000) argue is a pre-requisite for successful collaborative learning. Students should also be made aware that their screen behaviour may affect the relationship they build with the teachers and the amount and quality of feedback they receive. When cameras are turned off, it is more difficult for instructors to engage in a dialogue with students and know how they are responding to materials, what they are feeling, what they understand and do not understand, and whether they need help. In short, it is important that from the very beginning instructors make it clear to students that turning the cameras on is both desirable and desired conduct in an online classroom.

In addition to conformity, concerns about appearance ranked high among respondents of both genders, although the effect was stronger

among female respondents. Physical appearance plays an important role in personality formation. Harter (1987) reports that in middle childhood and adolescence, a sense of self-worth depends more on perceived physical attractiveness than on scholastic competence, athletic skills, or social acceptance. Appearance comparisons are an important socio-cultural factor and one of the main causes of body dissatisfaction (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Negative body images are developed when individuals perceive a gap between their actual body image and the body they would like to have, or when they judge themselves to be less attractive than other people.

The pressure to compare oneself to others can be understood in terms of self-objectification theory, which was originally proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). This holds that due to the sexual objectification of women in mainstream media, from early childhood girls are exposed to the idea that a woman's body is something to be looked at and judged by others. As they grow up, they internalize observers' perspectives on their physical selves. Their bodies and faces are subjected to constant self-surveillance and evaluation, and they value themselves in terms of their physical and sexual attractiveness while ignoring other characteristics. Perceived gaps between ideal-self and real-self often can lead to psychological and health problems such as depression, anxiety, shame, low self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders. Some studies (e.g., de Guzman & Nishina, 2014) suggest that Asian girls are particularly at risk of developing a negative body image due to the sociocultural association of female beauty with a thin body.

While the original theory focused on self-objectification of women, empirical research has reported that men are also susceptible as they internalize ideals of male attractiveness: a muscular body, physical strength, and dominance (Moradi, 2010). Furthermore, recent studies draw attention to the influence of newer types of media such as video games and social networking sites. A meta-analysis of research on self-objectification by Karsay, Knoll and Matthes (2018) found that video games and online media tend to have more profound self-objectification effects than television. This is because they create a stronger psychological feeling of presence in a media environment, tend to depict highly sexualized female and male characters, and make it possible to engage in a game by playing a character with a body more idealized than one's own. Considering the immense popularity video games and comic books have in Japan, their influence on appearance culture and students' behaviour should not be overlooked.

An increase in the use of social media is seen as another factor contributing to self-objectification. While in the past comparison targets were usually models and celebrities seen in fashion magazines and on television, social networking sites have now made 'ordinary people' the target of comparisons. Social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook, where a vast number of photos are uploaded daily and on which people often present an idealized version of themselves, offer regular opportunities for comparisons with others that may lead to a negative self-body image (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015). Indeed, a few studies have reported that students who spend more time on

Facebook are more likely to compare themselves to others and feel more dissatisfied with their appearance (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Tiggemann, & Slater, 2013, 2014). Other studies suggest that appearance comparisons against peers are more likely to cause body image concerns than comparisons with celebrities or models, possibly because the appearance of peers is seen as more attainable than that of celebrities, who are thought to have more resources available to improve their looks (Carey, Donaghue, & Broderick, 2014; Fardouly and Vartanian, 2015).

Although research on the effects of videoconferencing technology on body image remains sparse, it is reasonable to suggest that prolonged periods of confronting one's own image on the screen will prompt students to start comparing themselves to others. In a pioneering study on this topic, Pfund, Hill and Harriger (2020) investigated the relationship between the use of video chatting and appearance satisfaction in a sample of female students. Although no correlation was found between overall time spent online and appearance satisfaction, the latter was found to be lower among females who engaged in appearance comparisons more frequently. These students were also more likely to use appearance enhancement features on Zoom such as 'Touch up my appearance' and spend more time looking at themselves during video calls.

Given the adverse effects appearance culture may have on the physical and mental well-being of young people, the problem of self-

objectification should be addressed in schools even if camera use were not a problem. Drawing students' attention to the dangers of appearance comparisons could help them develop more positive attitudes towards their physical appearance and recognize their worth and uniqueness. With greater self-acceptance, turning a camera on during an online class may become less of an issue.

Another way of diverting students' attention away from appearance comparisons and the feeling they are being looked at is to create a learning environment in which they can define their *social presence*. *Social presence* was the term originally used by social psychologists Short, Williams and Christie (1976, p. 65) to describe "the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of interpersonal relationships". Garrison, Anderson and Archer (1999) view social presence as one of the three essential elements of an educational experience. They state that meaningful learning takes place in a *community of inquiry* in which the participants (teachers and learners) construct meaning through sustained critical reflection and discourse (*cognitive presence*), the educational experience is designed, facilitated, and directed (*teaching presence*), and learners can project themselves socially and affectively (*social presence*). Social presence has a direct impact on the success of an educational experience. In an online learning environment, it is essential for learners to project themselves as 'real people'. "Evidence that the other is attending" is necessary to make the interaction socially meaningful (Short et al., 1976, p. 44). Students must be able to identify

with the community and feel that they are in an open and trusting environment in which they can form interpersonal relationships and communicate freely.

This can be achieved by assigning tasks in which students share not only facts and information but also their personal experiences and emotions. Emotions are important because they influence task motivation, persistence, and critical thinking ability, all of which have a direct effect on learning outcomes (Garrison et al., 1999). Self-disclosure also removes barriers between individuals and builds understanding and support (Cutler, 1995).

Self-disclosure and the expression of emotions can be promoted through group projects and activities. Group work naturally encourages students to address their peers by name. The use of vocatives and inclusive pronouns such as *we*, *our*, or *us* conveys feelings of closeness and promotes group cohesion (Rourke et al., 1999). In foreign language classes, adding some ludic activities can bring humour into the classroom and create a positive learning environment. Humour helps decrease social distance, softens interpersonal conflicts, and promotes group cohesion (Gorham & Chrisotphel, 1990; Eggins & Slade, 1997). If students' attention is focused on the task and they feel they are engaged in meaningful communication, they will spend less time worrying about the cameras and their physical appearance. These kinds of activities can also increase participation among students who reported turning off their

cameras so they would not be seen not paying attention or doing other things.

The breakout room option on Zoom is extremely useful for promoting student bonding and group cohesion. Working on a task without the constant presence of the teacher gives students a sense of 'privacy' and an opportunity to build relationships with their peers as well as increase their confidence. Students are likely to feel less anxious turning on their cameras in front of a small group of their peers than in front of the whole class. A small group environment also makes it easier for students to share their personal information and affirm their identity, express their views, and acknowledge the views of others as well as offer peer support. Some studies suggest that when students are working in breakout rooms their level of engagement with the session content is higher than when they are working in a traditional classroom. For example, Chandler (2016) reports that pairs working in breakout rooms on Blackboard Collaborate produced more ideas than students working on the same activity in face-to-face tutorials.

Students' camera anxiety can also be reduced by making some simple adjustments to Zoom settings. When working in the main room, students should be encouraged to select an Active Speaker View option, which automatically displays a large view of the participant who is speaking rather than a Gallery View, which presents video panels of all participants. Hiding self-view can also help students escape the feeling that they are looking at the mirror all day.

Instructors can also take advantage of a new Immersive View option, which allows hosts to bring participants in a single virtual background such as a classroom or a meeting room and create a more cohesive, natural feeling meeting environment. In addition, it is important to show students that many of their fears are ungrounded. Castelli and Sarvary (2021) suggest making students aware of what Gilovich and Savitsky (1991) referred to as the “spotlight effect”, that is, people’s tendency to overestimate the extent to which they are watched and evaluated by others.

In addition to group conformity and appearance insecurities, privacy concerns were also common reasons for turning off the cameras. Some students did not feel comfortable about their homes or family members being visible on the screen. While these concerns cannot always be removed, students should be reminded that they can use a virtual background or select the Blur Background option to maintain their privacy. They should also be encouraged to communicate in advance to their family members the schedule of their synchronous sessions to reduce any disturbances as much as possible. Not all students may be able to secure a private space, but these simple measures can improve the environment of many.

Conclusion

As Schrage (1995, p. 137) pointed out, “technology inevitably shapes the way people relate to each other”. While videoconferencing cannot replace face-to-face interaction, it can certainly make communication

feel more natural and personal.

Inevitably, not all students will be able or willing to join classes with their cameras on. Some may lack the necessary technology or a stable internet connection. Others may have personal, possibly sensitive reasons for keeping their cameras off. Individual circumstances must be considered, and personal decisions must be respected. Students should never be penalized for turning off their cameras. A mandatory use of cameras would only increase students' frustration and anxiety and have a detrimental effect on learning outcomes.

Yet, the fact that some students may have specific and valid reasons for turning their cameras off should not be a reason for allowing cameras-off to become the norm. The results of the survey clearly indicated that for most students, a decision to turn off the cameras was motivated by a desire to fit in with their peers rather than problems with technology or privacy concerns. Not doing anything to encourage camera use among such students robs them of opportunities to learn in a warmer, more supportive, and engaging environment. Instructors should strive to understand the challenges individual students may face, respect their feelings, and help them whenever they can. However, this does not imply endorsing a distant, uncollaborative learning environment deprived of affective bonding and human contact in which only dry, mechanical exchanges of information take place. Technology may change the way we communicate, but we still learn together even when we are apart.

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Appendix

Survey on camera use in online classes

The purpose of this survey is to learn more about students' use of cameras in online classes. You do not need to include your name or student number. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. What grade are you in now?

2nd grade

3rd grade

4th grade

2. Gender

Male

Female

3. Circle the answer that is true for you.

I always had my camera ON in real-time classes.

I sometimes had my camera ON in real-time classes.

I never had my camera ON in real-time classes.

4. If you turned the camera OFF, what were the reasons for this? (Select ALL answers that are true for you.)

I was concerned about my appearance.

I was concerned about other people being seen behind me.

I felt like everyone was looking at me the whole time.

I was concerned about my room being seen behind me.

I was concerned about distracting my classmates.

I was concerned about distracting my teacher.

Other students kept their cameras off, so I did not want to stand out.

I didn't want to be seen not paying attention.

I didn't want to be seen walking away from my computer.

I didn't want to be seen doing other things on the computer.

My webcam was not working.

My internet connection was weak.

Other: _____

5. What was the MOST IMPORTANT reason for not turning on your camera?

6. Do you have any other comments to make about camera use in online classes? (You can answer this question in Japanese.)
