

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Supporting Engagement in English Language Learning During COVID-19 Using Paper-Based Textbooks: A Case Study of Japanese Universities

Hiroyuki Ida<sup>1</sup>, Yaoko Matsuoka<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Josai University, Saitama, Japan* <sup>2</sup>*International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan*

**Research Domain:** Digital University and new learning technologies (DU)

**Abstract:** This study investigates the use of paper-based textbooks in Japanese universities to support students' engagement in English language learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent research features the introduction of technology-driven pedagogies as necessitated by the health crisis, whereas the current study focuses on the significance of paper-based textbooks for English language learning. The study designed an online survey composed of five multiple-choice questions, which were rated using a four-point Likert-type scale, and an open-ended question where students can narrate their experiences. The study recruited 94 college students majoring in education. The results demonstrated that 72% of the participants acknowledged the effectiveness of the use of paper-based textbooks during the pandemic. However, the study proposes that a future challenge lies in the means of eliciting their reflections because the students did not describe any negative aspects in the use of paper-based textbooks. Furthermore, it proposes that paper-based textbooks should be incorporated into online teaching and various online materials to develop L2 competencies effectively through multifaceted learning.

**Paper:**

### Introduction

This study investigates the use of paper-based textbooks to support the engagement of students from Japanese universities in English language learning. With the spread of COVID-19 and given the limited time to develop learning materials, online teaching encourages fostering students' learning through technology-driven pedagogies (Rose et al., 2021). In the context of language teaching, scholars in the field of computer-assisted language teaching discuss the efficiency of using technology (Farr & Murray, 2016). However, despite the comprehensive discussion on the use of online resources (Martín-Monje & Borthwick, 2021; Rose et al., 2021), studies that examine the role of paper-based textbooks during the pandemic are few. As such, textbooks continue to play a crucial role in emergency situations, which leave insufficient time for the development of learning materials (Tomlinson, 2012). Furthermore, Gourlay (2020) suggested that students of literacy studies may use these paper-based resources effectively in remote learning. Building on relevant research, the current study investigates the use of paper-based textbooks during the COVID-19 pandemic. This

study contributes to the discussions on the role of these materials in English language learning and that in the age of digital universities. However, this study refrains from comparing any context of the digital environment but focuses on the practices experienced by the researchers in an effort to address the need for education during the pandemic.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted in December 2020 at a co-educational university in Tokyo, Japan. The participants were 94 first-year students majoring in education with lower-intermediate English proficiency and varied learning motivations. The university provided online materials in the spring semester and a paper-based textbook in the fall semester. An online questionnaire was disseminated via a learning management system. The questionnaire was composed of five multiple-choice questions on the effectiveness, benefits, drawbacks and the easiest and most difficult aspects of using textbooks in online classes. The students could add further comments after each response. The items were rated using a four-point Likert-type scale. The questionnaire also posed an open-ended question that elicited their views about online instruction. The study adhered to approved procedures for research ethics and informed consent, including anonymity and confidentiality.

## Results

In total, 72% and 6.6% of the participants stated that using textbooks in online classes was effective and less effective, respectively, whereas 17% provided no responses. In terms of benefits, 43% reported usefulness in sharing information in class, ease in reviewing and previewing the course content and a perceived sense of togetherness. Moreover, 36% responded that paper-based textbooks provided more detailed information than online materials. For drawbacks, the students pointed to the unfinished or wasted parts of textbooks and their costs. Furthermore, many students expressed that materials for online classes should be provided online only. Interestingly, others reported that using paper-based textbooks did not negatively affect learning.

## Discussion

The results illustrated the practical and cognitive aspects of the students' perception of textbook use in online classes. The majority of students welcomed the use of textbooks, which may have made instruction easy for teachers. Although the survey noted a few negative aspects, these faults could be attributed to online learning instead of textbooks. Moreover, the study observed an unexpectedly significant result: students shared a sense of unity or togetherness by sharing the same textbook with the teacher and their peers, which may have largely motivated them to continue their studies despite the pandemic. The existing research suggests that the lack of a sense of community is a notably negative factor in online learning (Mays, 2016), where group cohesion is one of the critical elements of success in e-learning (Soles, 2019). Thus, the current study confirmed that paper-based textbooks, as suggested by Tomlinson (2012), remained effective in facilitating the experiential aspect of students in English language learning in digital universities.

## Future challenges

Although the study observed such a positive tendency, a detailed exploration using various methods, such as interviews, are required. Moreover, the students did not fully describe their experiences in

the free description sections. This tendency may suggest that they are neither familiar with answering such types of question nor able to reflect on their experience in depth at the time of survey (Macfarlane & Gourlay, 2009). Thus, the study argues that the future challenge in education is to formulate methods for eliciting their experiences through reflection. Based on the abovementioned findings, the study proposes that paper-based textbooks should be incorporated into online teaching and various online materials in preparation for the multifaceted learning environment induced by COVID-19 with a sense of unity.

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