

Students' perspectives of online language learning: What did we learn?

Andrew Thompson* Tim Pritchard** Dragana Lazic***

*Fukuoka Women's University: thompson@fwu.ac.jp **Seinan University: t-pritchard@seinan-gu.ac.jp ***Fukuoka Women's University: dlazic@fwu.ac.jp

ABSTRACT

The Internet is a significant technological advancement of our generation and is rapidly reshaping the workplace and educational institutions. Schools, colleges, and universities across the globe have increasingly incorporated online education into their educational mix. However, Japan has traditionally relied on a very teacher-centered and traditional textbook-based learning environment (Aoki, 2010). This may be in part due to the lack of professional support provided to teachers in Japan regarding the use of technology for language learning courses (Latchem, Jung, Aoki & Ozkul, 2008).

In 2020 due to COVID-19 Japanese policymakers closed elementary, secondary schools, and universities. Many colleges and universities followed by extending winter vacations in order to avoid infections among students, staff and the wider community. The global spread of COVID-19, and the extended school, college, and university closures accelerated the adoption of online education in Japan, but at what cost to the many Japanese students that lack the digital skills and/or tools to thrive in an online environment (Caldwell, 2018).

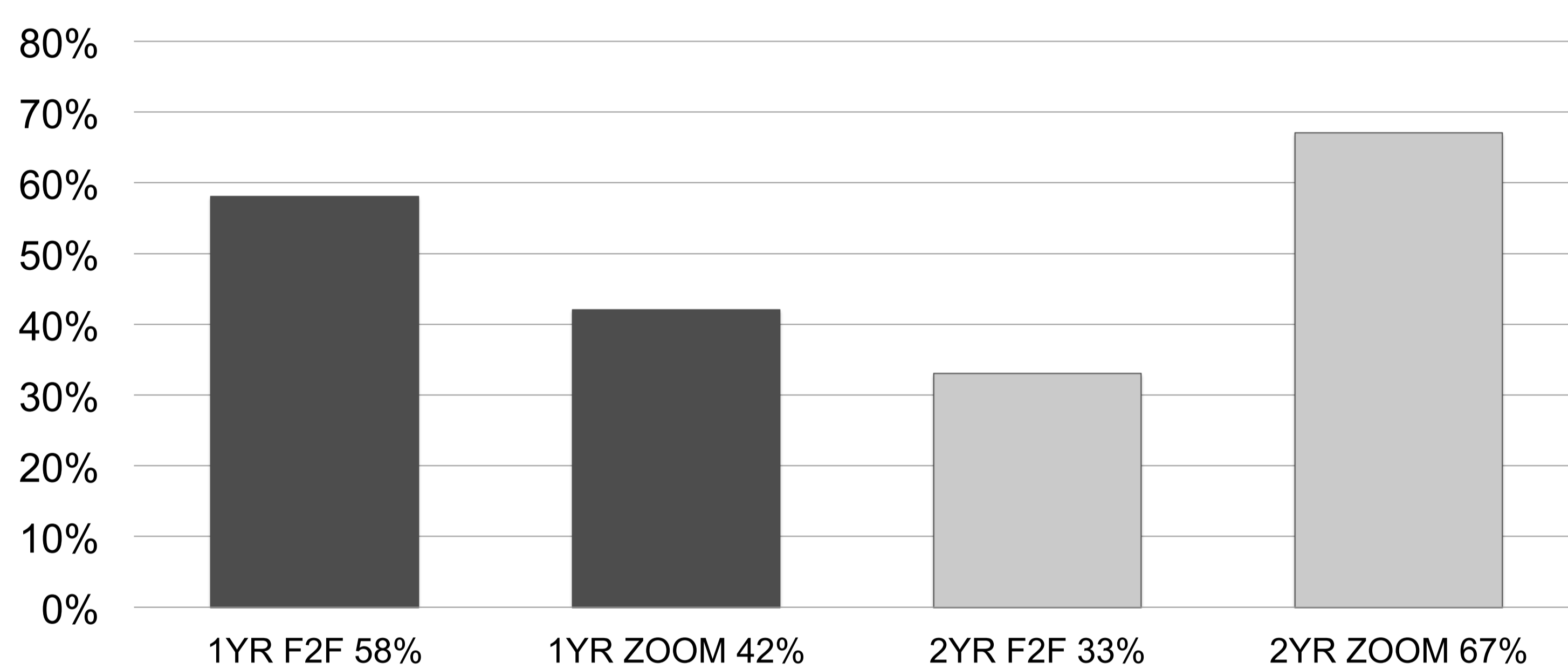
This mixed-method study investigated (a) student online vs. in-person experiences, interests, and preferences, and (b) does online learning provide benefits to academic learners and potentially produce better course and academic outcomes for particular student types?

This study involved both first (N = 71) and second-year (N = 46) female students in a compulsory English language program from a public university in southwestern Japan. Participants were non-English majors and came from three of the university faculties (Environmental Science, Food and Health Sciences, and International Liberal Arts). Student TOEFL ITP® score average 478 (CEFR Range B1 – B2). Participants completed an online survey consisting of 10 items measured on a 6-point Likert scale and 14 open-ended questions in the fourth quarter of the 2021 academic year.

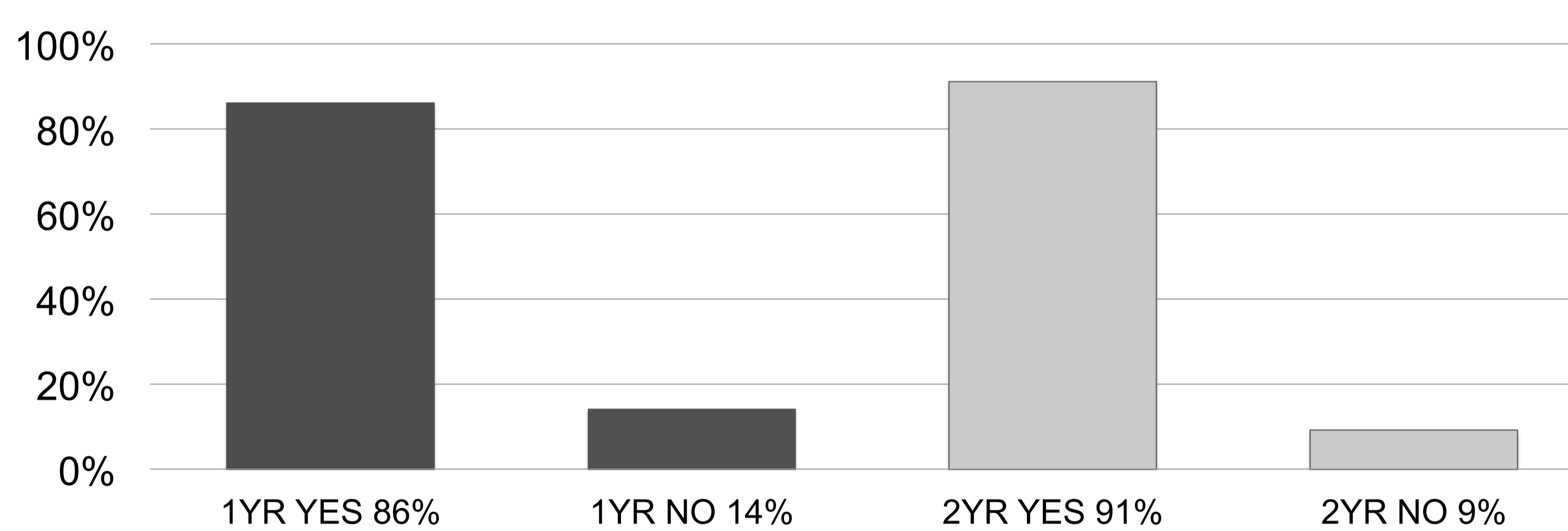
The findings regarding online language learning, specifically relating to the Zoom platform indicate that a student's academic year, university major and English proficiency may impact their perspectives. The researchers hope that policymakers, university administrators, and educators continue to investigate students' experiences, interests, preferences, and needs for online language learning to enhance future students' academic opportunities.

DATA SNAPSHOT: INSTRUCTION PERSPECTIVES

Which is better, face-to-face (F2F) or Zoom lessons?



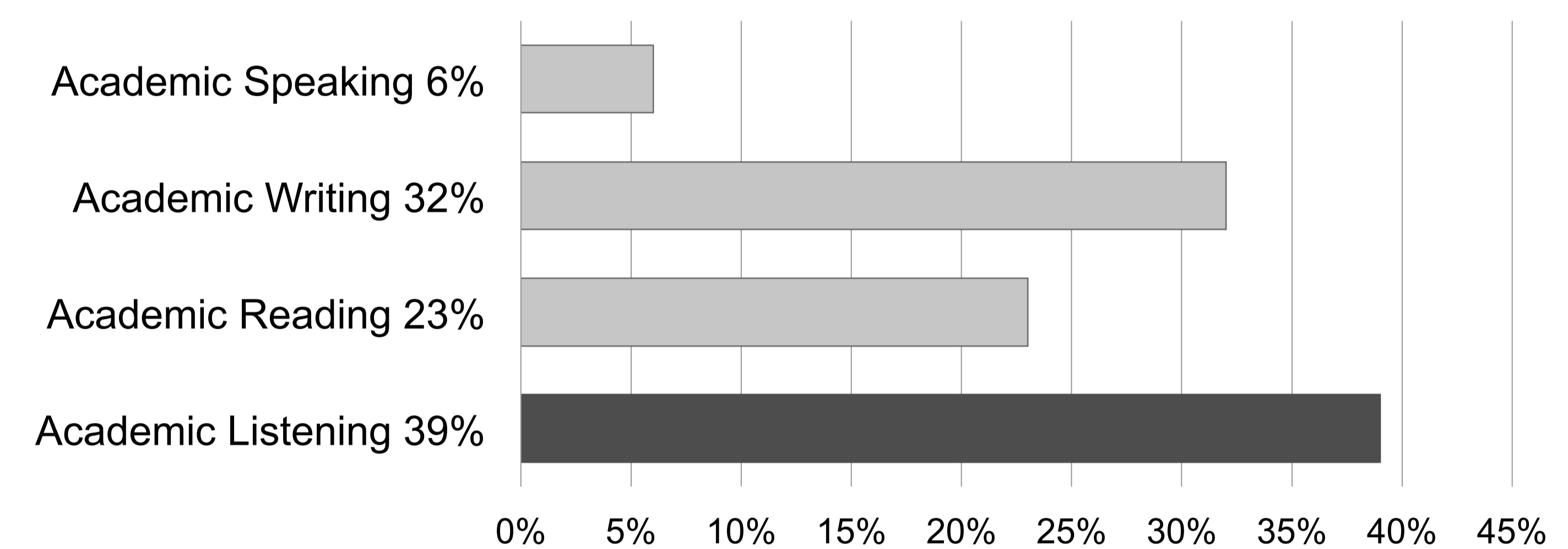
Do you think Zoom lessons will help you study English?



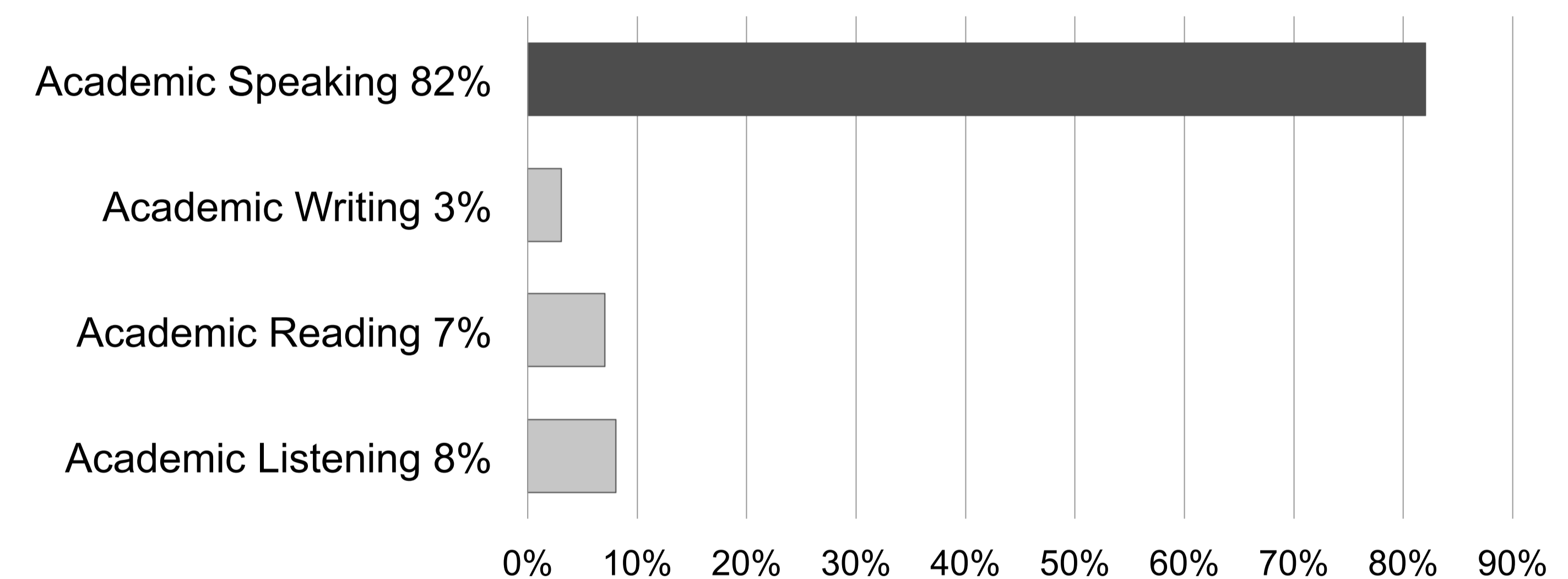
Data Sample: First-year (N = 71) and second-year students (N = 46)

DATA SNAPSHOT: COURSE PREFERENCES

Which course is best suited for Zoom?



Which course is not suited for Zoom?



Data Sample: First-year students (N = 71)

DISCUSSION

The preliminary findings of the quantitative data captured in this research project clearly indicate that student preferences relating to the form of instruction (*Which is better, face-to-face (F2F) or Zoom lessons?*) depended on a student's academic year (see: Data Snapshot: Instruction Perspectives). This may be due to first-year students' lack of experience with online education during high school, more specifically the online Zoom platform, and also the increased experience that second-year students had developed since university classes moved online in early 2020. However, both first-year (N = 71) and second-year students (N = 46) reported that online Zoom lessons had helped them study English (*Do you think Zoom lessons will help you study English?*).

When asked about which English course was best suited to the online Zoom platform, responses did vary between first-year (Academic Listening 39%) and second-year students (Academic Writing 48%). This may be due to the difference in lesson content and also the reduced contact hours of second-year students. In relation to which English language course is not suited to the online Zoom platform, both first-year (82%) and second-year (67%) students reported Academic Speaking as the least suited to the online learning.

During preliminary analysis of the qualitative data captured in this research project, four themes emerged: Educational, Convenient, Technological and Physical. Based on student responses to the open-ended questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of online Zoom lessons, it is clear that students are able to identify the benefits that online language learning may provide during their university life and beyond, especially if institutions are seeking to provide a convenient, safe and technologically advanced environment.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maximize and/or minimize online language learning for specific courses based on student experiences, interests, preferences and needs
- Provide students, teachers and administrators with training on online language learning platform functionality to develop user confidence/engagement
- Encourage student and teacher feedback on online language learning platforms to proactively improve the learning experience and academic outcomes
- Continue to investigate students' perspectives of online language learning platforms, materials and resources to allow Japanese students to benefit in an online environment

REFERENCES:

- Aoki, A. (2010). The Use of ICT and e-Learning in Higher Education in Japan. *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology*, 854–858. <https://publications.waset.org>
- Caldwell, M. (2018). Japanese university students' perceptions on the use of ICT and mobile learning in an EFL setting. *Call-Ej*, 19(2), 188–216. <http://callej.org/journal/19-2/Caldwell2018.pdf>
- Latchem, C., Jung, I., Aoki, K., & Ozkul, A. E. (2008). The tortoise and the hare enigma in e-transformation in Japanese and Korean higher education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 39(4), 610–630. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00771.x>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This research project would not have been possible without an incentive grant [度研究奨励交付金お] provided by Fukuoka Women's University 2021-2022