

# Connecting Through Flipgrid: Examining Social Presence of English Language Learners in an Online Course During the Pandemic

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the social presence framework (Rourke et al., 2001), in order to examine the ways that university-level international students develop social interaction and support in a virtual asynchronous learning community in an online class during the COVID-19 pandemic. English language learners (ELLs) participated in weekly online exchanges on a video discussion platform called Flipgrid in the form of oral dialogue journals for reflection on their academic learning and experiences during these disruptive times. These ELLs' video journals and peer responses (N = 198) were collected for content analysis, in order to investigate how the use of video-based asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) can establish positive social and emotional support and a sense of community. The findings of the study indicate that ACMC was successful in establishing interconnectedness in terms of high levels of self-disclosure, positive facial expressions, and other indicators of social and emotional support, demonstrating social presence. Implications of the findings are discussed in terms of how social presence is expressed and fostered in video-based ACMC communities during emergency remote teaching.

**KEYWORDS:** COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION; VIDEO DISCUSSION PLATFORM; SOCIAL PRESENCE; VIRTUAL LEARNING COMMUNITY.

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## 1. Introduction

As the whole globe faces the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals' interconnectedness, empathy, and compassion have never been more crucial, especially within educational systems (Niemi, 2020). Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides an environment for support and connection during disruptive times such as the present. It has become increasingly imperative to understand ways to “demonstrate empathy and resilience, build relationships across distance, and call upon our collective resolve to strengthen our schools and our communities” (CASEL CARES, 2020, para. 1). The TESOL International Association (2020) revealed that distance learning has failed most English language learners (ELLs), with less than 17% of language educators reporting regular attendance by ELLs in remote classes. Many ELLs have encountered a sense of loss as they adjust to the new norm in which “Zoom universities” do not allow face-to-face interaction with their professors and peers. This lack of social and emotional interaction fosters feelings of anxiety, isolation, and stress in their learning (Alexander & Endo, 2020).

Previous studies reported that at least 38% to 50% of young people aged 18–24 years old experienced higher levels of loneliness and isolation during the lockdown (Rauschenberg et al., 2021). There is an urgent need to better support international students at this time, especially when many of them are experiencing a sense of loss of their first-year college life and may be isolated in their home countries. Hence, the current study utilizes the social presence model (Rourke et al., 2001) to examine the ways in which university-level first-year international students remotely enrolled in an ESL speaking class develop social interaction and support in a virtual asynchronous learning community. In order to build a supportive SEL community, this study applied a video discussion platform called Flipgrid as a pedagogical tool, since researchers studying computer-mediated communication (CMC) suggest that incorporating asynchronous CMC (ACMC) into a virtual learning community could foster SEL and interaction (Arnold et al., 2005).

Griffiths (2010) offers a model of video-based ACMC to enhance the communication and social presence between instructors and their students. While ACMC studies focus on implementation and students' perspective (Bartlett, 2018; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2019; Stoszkowski, 2018), little research has examined how video-based ACMC applies social presence among ELLs to enhance language skills. Moreover, published research tends to focus on individual growth as language learners, but it does not comment on their participation as part of a community of learners (Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2016). Our study attempts to fill these gaps in the literature by examining how ELLs display social presence in weekly online exchanges using video-based ACMC

in the form of oral dialogue journals and peer-response videos, building an online learning community during disruptive times.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Social Presence Model

This study drew on the social presence model (Rourke et al., 2001; based on Garrison et al., 2000) as a theoretical framework to investigate how video-based ACMC can facilitate positive social interactions and the formation of communities among ELLs. The concept of social presence is based on the model of a community of inquiry (CoI), which proposes that learning occurs through the interaction of three key components within virtual learning environments: cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Garrison et al., 2000). Community of inquiry refers to a group of individuals who engage in critical discourse and reflection, in order to create meaning and develop mutual understanding. This framework entails a process of constructing deeper and more meaningful learning experiences collaboratively through the three above-mentioned key components (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). Cognitive presence refers to the learners' abilities to construct meaning and demonstrate critical thinking; teaching presence refers to teachers' abilities to provide expertise and design a curriculum; and social presence refers to learners' abilities to present and project themselves socially and emotionally in a CoI (Rourke et al., 2001). While cognitive and teaching presence are crucial components for academic success, they are not sustainable without learners projecting themselves socially and emotionally into the community as genuine individuals (i.e., social presence).

Social presence allows communication to be more engaging because learners construct meaning through interaction, which initiates and fosters critical thinking. Therefore, social presence has played an important role in the field of CMC for language learning and virtual learning communities. To examine social presence in asynchronous online discussion environments, Rourke and co-workers (2001) developed a content analysis framework containing affective, interactive, and cohesive indicators. The affective category is identified as emotional behaviors including expression of emotions, use of humor, and self-disclosure. This includes information regarding the primary message, which is one of the components of social presence investigated in this study. The interactive category relates to ways learners communicate and interact with other users within the platform, such as continuing a thread, quoting from others' messages, referring explicitly to others' messages, asking questions, complimenting, and expressing appreciation or agreement. Lastly, the cohesive

category refers to social functions such as vocatives, addresses, or references to the group using inclusive pronouns, phatics, and salutations.

Rourke and colleagues' (2001) content analysis framework was utilized in this study, because "content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data" (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2021, para. 1). This particular framework analyzed the data by quantifying variables found in responses through a series of indicators which reflect emotional behavior, interactive and communicative behavior, and social functions of the participants. Previous studies have applied this framework to examine social presence in various online learning contexts, and these indicators have been used or adapted by previous studies for different online settings in text-based ACMC (Fornara & Lomicka, 2019; Nami et al., 2018), as well as synchronous CMC (SCMC) (Lin et al., 2013); however, the model was not commonly used in video-based ACMC (Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2016). As the use of digital devices and video-based platforms increases, researchers need to be more inclusive regarding ways to code multimodal data, so that they can evaluate and identify specific messages from video content. The content analysis framework proposed by Rourke and associates (2001) often used binary variables during the coding process to identify evidence of the three indicators, for instance, whether or not participants "ask questions" in the video (yes/no). However, the limitation of binary variables is that findings are not able to reveal more specific content and topics during the exchange and conversation. Therefore, in order to identify more in-depth content within video responses, we created a message-level indicator within the framework to define specific topics that are presented in these videos. The message-level indicator includes messages about love, negativity, and personal stories. These categories were designed based on a study that analyzed content in YouTube video messages (Choi & Behm-Morawitz, 2017). Since affective, interactive, and cohesive indicators did not account for these elements, by adding this message-level indicator we attempt to contribute to the existing literature by investigating to what extent participants disclose their interests and shared experiences during a time of crisis.

With the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic forcing remote learning, we see emerging scholarship on the affordances and challenges of applying asynchronous video reflection as a way to enhance social presence in times of stress (Lowenthal et al., 2020; Ryan, 2021). Therefore, it is critical to gain a better understanding of how ELLs interact within a virtual learning community during times of crisis.

## 2.2 Video Discussion Platforms for Virtual Asynchronous Learning Communities

In previous CMC research, social presence has been regarded as a vital factor impacting the effectiveness of language learning (Ko, 2012; Satar, 2015, 2020). Computer-mediated communication can be divided into SCMC (synchronous) and ACMC (asynchronous), and although there is an abundance of research on SCMC, there is a lack of understanding of how social presence can be maintained in video-based ACMC. Compared to video-based SCMC, video-based ACMC provides more processing time for ELLs to respond to other users, which results in more complex utterances and richer content (Sotillo, 2000). With these rich and complex interactions, ELLs have more opportunities for in-depth discussions and higher levels of social presence (Yaneske & Oates, 2010).

Video-based ACMC also offers opportunities for personal connections by using audio and video features, which can better deliver users' diverse cognitive and affective expressions (Ryan, 2021; Yaneske & Oates, 2010), and foster a higher level of learner consciousness in using the target language and self-correcting errors (Yamada, 2009). Video-based ACMC encourages more exchange of different perspectives, construction of knowledge and establishment of social networks (Lowenthal et al., 2020; Pop et al., 2011). Research findings reveal that one of the main factors impacting social presence is intimacy, with this factor closely relating to social cues in terms of facial expression, direct gaze (into the camera), gestures, body language, and tone of voice (Ko, 2012; Satar, 2015, 2020). Video-based CMC imitates face-to-face communication with facial expression, intonation, and eye contact that has been found to be significantly more effective and accepted by students (Berglund et al., 2015), and these social cues could be influenced by users' digital literacy and different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Satar, 2015). These non-verbal cues could reduce psychological distance between the interlocutors, thereby encouraging active participation and positive attitudes, while also enhancing social presence (Satar, 2015). Without these social cues, it is more challenging to develop a sense of community (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). The fewer these social cues appear in an interaction, the lower the social presence will be. When social presence is reduced, the sense of community decreases (Rovai, 2002). Therefore, more social presence within a CoI results in more active participation and discussion.

More recent studies have investigated the effects of asynchronous use of video, and various findings exemplify how video-based ACMC offers affordances for remote language learning. For example, Cunningham and Link (2021) conducted a linguistic analysis of English as a second language (ESL) instructors' video feedback for students' essays and found that video feedback

provided more interpersonal connection and social presence than written feedback. Madzlan and colleagues' (2020) study supports previous research that an ACMC platform could provide more affordances than text-based ACMC. In their pre-pandemic mixed-methods work, researchers collected self-reported Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety questionnaire data from ESL students and found significant differences regarding decreasing the anxiety level of English public speaking by using video-based ACMC. This supports McNeil's (2014) earlier study, which investigated the correlation between foreign language anxiety and the affordances of an ACMC platform called Voiceboard. The results indicated that non-verbal cues can help learners to understand interlocutors better and feel less anxious while interacting in the target language. However, some social cues (e.g., direct gaze, speaking loudly and rapidly, leaning body forward) may be seen as aggressive, and this can be influenced by users' technology skills, personal preference, and cultural or linguistic backgrounds (Satar, 2015). Therefore, while exploring social presence in the multimodal CMC environment, educators should keep in mind that all communication is mediated through the lenses of digital platforms and individual backgrounds.

To encourage ELLs to engage in more social interaction, it is important to create a learning environment that reduces anxiety, enhances confidence, and fosters social and emotional learning. In addition, previous research findings show that ELLs are less self-conscious about saving face in CMC settings compared to face-to-face settings, so they are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of social presence through self-disclosure and lower levels of language learning anxiety (Cunningham & Link, 2021; Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2016; Madzlan et al., 2020). Based on the benefits presented above, the present study used a video discussion platform, Flipgrid, to create a space for ELLs to share their opinions, provide mutual support, express emotions, and reflect on their learning experiences.

### 2.3 Flipgrid

Flipgrid is a video-based platform that allows asynchronous discussion between students by posting a short video (between 30 seconds and 10 minutes), potentially responding to a prompt or answering a question. The video replies form a grid, where each viewer can then reply to their peers by text, emoji, or another video. This free tool has been used by 21 million users from more than 240 countries (Similiarweb, 2021). Some language educators use Flipgrid as a way to enhance their students' language acquisition, especially speaking skills, by combining the asynchronous platform with classroom scaffolding and support (Diflippantonio-Pen, 2020). In her research on students'

perception of using Flipgrid for language acquisition, Mango (2019) found that students significantly favor using the platform as a social collective learning tool, where each individual is offered a space to connect with others and express their views freely. In addition, Lee (2020) suggests that the use of Flipgrid as a classroom tool enhances students' interpersonal and intercultural communication as they watch each other's recordings and engage in an online asynchronous dialogue on cultural topics. Especially in a time of physical distance due to the COVID-19 pandemic, asynchronous video discussion platforms like Flipgrid provide an effective communication tool as an alternative to synchronous video conferencing like Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams (Lowenthal et al., 2020). While the scholarship on Flipgrid is increasing, previous studies focused on instructional methods (Bartlett, 2018; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2019; Stoszkowski, 2018) and students' perceptions (Johnson, & Skarphol, 2018; Mango, 2019), with limited research analyzing the videos themselves in order to explore the nature of the communication and social processes on the virtual platform. Therefore, applying the social presence framework alongside the use of Flipgrid in ACMC, we examined the following research questions.

1. What are the different types of (a) affective, (b) message, and (c) cohesive components used in journal videos?
2. What are the different types of (a) affective, (b) message, (c) cohesive, and (d) interactive components used in peer-response videos?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Context**

To investigate how the use of video-based ACMC can establish and foster social presence and a sense of community, content analysis was conducted on 198 videos. These videos were gathered in one public-speaking ESL course at an arts and media college in the Midwestern United States that focused on practicing oral English skills during the fall semester of 2020, with 10 students. The curriculum included both synchronous meetings held weekly on Zoom and asynchronous discussion videos. The course used the Flipgrid platform for asynchronous speaking practice, which was integrated in the course learning management system so student videos could only be seen by people who were enrolled in the course. The researcher led a 30-minute learner training workshop to show how to navigate the platform, including how to record and reply to videos, and to apply digital features such as emojis and drawings. Students then practiced recording in Flipgrid during a synchronous Zoom session of the class and asked questions if they had technical issues.

**Table 1:**  
Themes of Journal Entries

Journal entries	Themes
1	Introduction
2	My life during the pandemic
3	My college life
4	My excitement and expectations
5	How do I manage stress?
6	My ups and downs
7	My journey of learning foreign languages
8	My Thanksgiving plans
9	Moving forward

Students received a weekly journal prompt to make one journal video each week for nine weeks (a total of 78 videos), and they were also asked to create optional videos responding to their peers (a total of 120 peer-response videos). Table 1 contains the themes of journal entries. Students had a maximum of 90 seconds to record each video, and were encouraged to respond to two other peers about their content (for example: ask a question, share their own story, provide suggestions). Each journal was graded based on three categories: content richness, effective delivery, and participation. The instructor established time limits, and students could record repeatedly until they were satisfied with the recording (see Figure 1 for a screenshot of the Flipgrid layout).

### 3.2 Participants

The course demographics consisted of 10 international undergraduate students from seven different majors at a small Midwestern college. Participants were all freshmen, aged 18 ( $n = 8$ ) or 19 ( $n = 2$ ), females ( $n = 5$ ) and males ( $n = 5$ ), and representing the following countries: China ( $n = 4$ ), Colombia ( $n = 1$ ), Kazakhstan ( $n = 1$ ), Guatemala ( $n = 1$ ), Taiwan ( $n = 1$ ), Hungary ( $n = 1$ ), and South Korea ( $n = 1$ ). There were some missing assignments throughout the semester due to technical difficulties or personal issues due to the pandemic, which affected students' participation at times. All participants' names in this study are pseudonyms.

International Oral Expression FA20  
by Ellen Yeh  
Follow Group  
263 Responses

August 31, 2020  
**Journal entry 2: My life after the pandemic.**  
This Topic was automatically generated from [Canvas Assignment](#). Click the record button to get started!

Record a Response

10 Responses  
502 views · 15 comments · 6.7 hours of engagement

Search

**Figure 1.** Screenshot of Flipgrid platform.

### 3.3 Coder Training

Instead of transcribing the videos, coders watched the videos to replicate student experiences, and to account for both verbal and non-verbal cues. Using a sample of course videos for coder training, two researchers were trained as coders for this study. The training lasted about a month, during which period agreement and modifications were made to the codebook. Each coder was given half of the videos in the actual sample to code. An overlap of 10% ( $n = 8$  videos) of the journal video sample and 10% ( $n = 12$  videos) of the peer-response video sample were given to each coder to assess inter-coder reliability using Krippendorff's  $\alpha$ . This  $\alpha$  number, which ranges from 0–1, helps to show that coders are consistently in agreement when coding for variables.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

In order to calculate inter-coder reliability, each coder's coding numbers for overlapping videos were compiled according to each variable and calculated using a free reliability calculation program called ReCal2: Reliability for 2 Coders (Freelon, n.d.). After obtaining inter-coder reliability for each variable, which are presented as Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  number in parentheses next to each variable, coding numbers for all samples were gathered, and frequency was calculated for each variable to identify the percentage of variable presence within the total number of videos for journal and peer videos.

Both journal and peer-response videos were analyzed using content analysis to identify video information, messages, and social presence components. Coders recorded video information (i.e., length, views, and response numbers) from video descriptions, and made judgments at the message level and at levels corresponding with Rourke and co-workers' (2001) social presence framework: affective, cohesive, and interactive. For peer-response videos, we included the interactive level and added additional variables in the cohesive level to encompass interactions when responding to peers.

#### 3.4.1 Video Information Level

This level was created to obtain basic statistical information for each video. Length and views in journal and peer-response videos were recorded, as well as the number of responses to each journal video. Because video information is indicated as numbers on each video, this level did not require meeting reliability.

#### 3.4.2 Affective Level

In order to examine components that can enhance and identify students' messages in their videos, the affective level was developed to include variables in relation to emotional expressions. For these variables, the overall video was considered to determine the main theme of the video, instead of counting each occurrence. For both types of videos, coders determined students' *main expression of emotion* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ) using positive (e.g., smile, content, laugh) and negative (e.g., anxious, angry, sad) indicators. Using an answer of yes or no, coders also coded different body languages: *poised and confident* ( $\alpha = .87$ ), *direct gaze* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), and *appropriate use of gesture* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ). Because Flipgrid allows users to add features that can contribute to the emotional tone of their message, various *digital features* were identified using yes or no. These features consisted of filters ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), positive stickers/emojis ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), negative stickers/emojis ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), drawings ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), and text ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ). Emotions are also related to the *use of humor*, which were also coded using yes or no with three variables: teasing ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), irony ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), and understatement ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

### 3.4.3 Message Level

Although students were given a short prompt (e.g., “describe your life during the pandemic”) each week to create their video, students were also free to create different messages that corresponded to the prompt. Because these videos sometimes had multiple messages, coders considered the overall video and determined the main topic of each video by using three types of messages. *Messages about love* ( $\alpha = .7$ ) were selected using a list comprising “loving yourself,” “loving/helping others,” “passion related to their career,” “passion related to their personal interests,” and “not mentioned.” *Messages about dealing with negativity* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ) were categorized using the options “dealing with personal obstacles,” “dealing with bullying,” “dealing with mental health issues,” “dealing with the pandemic,” and “not mentioned.” Lastly, *messages about personal stories* ( $\alpha = .7$ ) were coded using “social relationships,” “school-related issues,” “work-related issues,” and “not mentioned.”

### 3.4.4 Cohesive Level

This level illustrates how students referred to each other in the videos. For the journal videos, *addressing the group* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ) and *phatics and salutations* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ) were coded using yes or no. For the peer-response videos, an additional variable of *name reference* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ) was included to determine whether students were directly using the name of the student they were responding to.

### 3.4.5 Interactive Level

The interactive level was used to identify interactions exclusively within peer-response videos. Using yes or no, these variables included *quoting* ( $\alpha = .87$ ), *explicit message reference* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), *asking questions* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ), *complimenting* ( $\alpha = .7$ ), and *expressing agreement* ( $\alpha = 1.0$ ).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Research Question 1

Three components in the journal videos were identified to answer this question (see Table 2). For the affective component, the most notable findings come from how participants mostly used positive emotional expressions (80.8%,  $n = 63$ ) to convey their messages; however, they often lacked direct gaze (25.6%,  $n = 20$ ) to connect with their viewers. Even though they were using a video platform that allows creativity with digital features, such as drawing or using animations or digital stickers, no digital features were used more than twice per group (see Appendix A). Participants also used less humor in their videos. The most frequent humor strategy was teasing, which only constituted 5.1% ( $n$

**Table 2:**  
Descriptive Statistics for General Characteristics of 78 Journal Videos

<b>Variables</b>			
<b>Video level</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>
Video length (seconds)	85	6.73	62–92
Video views	14	8.42	1–34
Video responses	1.55	1.29	0–5
<b>Affective level</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of presence (frequency out of 78 videos)</b>		
Positive main emotion	80.8 ( <i>n</i> = 63)		
Poised and confident	57.7 ( <i>n</i> = 45)		
Direct gaze	25.6 ( <i>n</i> = 20)		
Appropriate use of gesture	30.8 ( <i>n</i> = 24)		
Use of digital features			
Filters	1.3 ( <i>n</i> = 1)		
Positive stickers/emojis	2.6 ( <i>n</i> = 2)		
Negative stickers/emojis	0 ( <i>n</i> = 0)		
Drawing	2.6 ( <i>n</i> = 2)		
Text	1.3 ( <i>n</i> = 1)		
Use of humor			
Teasing	5.1 ( <i>n</i> = 4)		
Irony	2.6 ( <i>n</i> = 2)		
Understatement	2.6 ( <i>n</i> = 2)		
<b>Message level</b>	<b>Frequency (% , <i>n</i> = 78)</b>		
Messages about love			
Loving yourself	6.4 ( <i>n</i> = 5)		
Loving/helping others	16.7 ( <i>n</i> = 13)		
Passion related to their career	23.1 ( <i>n</i> = 18)		
Passion related to their personal interests	46.2 ( <i>n</i> = 36)		
Not mentioned	7.7 ( <i>n</i> = 6)		
Messages about dealing with negativity			
Dealing with personal obstacles	29.5 ( <i>n</i> = 23)		
Dealing with bullying	0 ( <i>n</i> = 0)		
Dealing with mental health issues	12.8 ( <i>n</i> = 10)		
Dealing with the pandemic	30.8 ( <i>n</i> = 24)		
Not mentioned	26.9 ( <i>n</i> = 21)		
Messages about personal stories			
Social relationships	21.8 ( <i>n</i> = 17)		
School-related issues	48.7 ( <i>n</i> = 38)		
Work-related issues	15.4 ( <i>n</i> = 12)		
Not mentioned	14.1 ( <i>n</i> = 11)		
<b>Cohesive level</b>	<b>Frequency (% , <i>n</i> = 78)</b>		
Addressing the group	3.8 ( <i>n</i> = 3)		
Phatics and salutations	73.1 ( <i>n</i> = 57)		

= 4) of the videos. Furthermore, all the incidences of teasing were about themselves, rather than making fun of others. For instance, in one journal video a participant, Ana, teased herself as a stress eater who eats her feelings away:

I am a stress eater too [laughed]! I eat a lot when I feel stressed. In my senior year in high school, when I was preparing for college, I gained 10 pounds because I just kept feeling hungry [smiled].

For the message component, participants mostly loved talking about their personal interests (46.2%,  $n = 36$ ) and often mentioned school-related issues (48.7%,  $n = 38$ ). Even though only one journal prompt consisted of talking about the pandemic, this topic was frequently featured in 30.8% ( $n = 24$ ) of the videos. For instance, one participant, Pat, shared his experience regarding his mental health and traveling internationally to return home during a global pandemic:

When this whole pandemic started, I was actually in Chicago. I had to go back home and it was a crazy ride back to Hungary because they had closed the borders so I had to go through a land border. It was a pretty messy ride. I was dealing with some mental health issues at the time, and I had to be in quarantine for two weeks. The quarantine was really stressful for me.

As for the cohesive component, participants acknowledged viewers by frequently using *phatics and salutations*, which were seen in 73.1% ( $n = 57$ ) of the videos. Further examples are demonstrated in Appendix A.

## 4.2 Research Question 2

Peer-response videos were also examined to identify similar and additional variables. As shown in Table 3, for the affective component nearly all participants utilized positive emotions (96.7%,  $n = 116$ ) to respond to their peers. Continuing from their journal videos, they were still relatively unengaged through the lack of direct gaze (22.5%,  $n = 27$ ), minor use of filters (1.7%,  $n = 2$ ), and the use of teasing (5%,  $n = 6$ ) as their only humor strategy. They also had the least

**Table 3:**  
Descriptive Statistics for General Characters of 120 Peer-Response Videos

<b>Variables</b>			
<b>Video level</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Range</b>
Video length (seconds)	44	18.11	11–92
Video views	5.86	2.92	1–15

**Table 3** (continued)

<b>Affective level</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of presence/(frequency out of 120 videos)</b>
Positive main emotion	96.7 ( <i>n</i> = 116)
Poised and confident	54.2 ( <i>n</i> = 65)
Direct gaze	22.5 ( <i>n</i> = 27)
Appropriate use of gesture	17.5 ( <i>n</i> = 21)
Use of digital features	
Filters	1.7 ( <i>n</i> = 2)
Positive stickers/emojis	0 ( <i>n</i> = 0)
Negative stickers/emojis	0 ( <i>n</i> = 0)
Drawing	0.8 ( <i>n</i> = 1)
Text	0.8 ( <i>n</i> = 1)
Use of humor	
Teasing	5 ( <i>n</i> = 6)
Irony	0 ( <i>n</i> = 0)
Understatement	0 ( <i>n</i> = 0)
<b>Message level</b>	<b>Frequency (% , <i>n</i> = 120)</b>
Messages about love	
Loving yourself	8.3 ( <i>n</i> = 10)
Loving/helping others	5 ( <i>n</i> = 6)
Passion related to their career	23.3 ( <i>n</i> = 28)
Passion related to their personal interests	36.7 ( <i>n</i> = 44)
Not mentioned	26.7 ( <i>n</i> = 32)
Messages about dealing with negativity	
Dealing with personal obstacles	25 ( <i>n</i> = 30)
Dealing with bullying	0 ( <i>n</i> = 0)
Dealing with mental health issues	13.3 ( <i>n</i> = 16)
Dealing with the pandemic	20 ( <i>n</i> = 24)
Not mentioned	41.7 ( <i>n</i> = 50)
Messages about personal stories	
Social relationships	21.7 ( <i>n</i> = 26)
School-related issues	37.5 ( <i>n</i> = 45)
Work-related issues	10 ( <i>n</i> = 12)
Not mentioned	30.8 ( <i>n</i> = 37)
<b>Cohesive level</b>	<b>Frequency (% , <i>n</i> = 120)</b>
Name reference	94.2 ( <i>n</i> = 113)
Addressing the group	24.2 ( <i>n</i> = 29)
Phatics and salutations	97.5 ( <i>n</i> = 117)
<b>Interactive level</b>	<b>Frequency (% , <i>n</i> = 120)</b>
Quoting	1.7 ( <i>n</i> = 2)
Explicit message reference	100 ( <i>n</i> = 120)
Asking questions	12.5 ( <i>n</i> = 15)
Complimenting	64.2 ( <i>n</i> = 77)
Expressing agreement	85 ( <i>n</i> = 103)

use of appropriate gestures, some examples of which are shown in Appendix A. For the message component, participants mostly talked about their interests (36.7%,  $n = 44$ ) and school-related issues (37.5%,  $n = 45$ ). However, negative messages were less utilized, as 41.7% ( $n = 50$ ) of the peer-response videos did not mention any negative topics. For the cohesive component, participants actively included others by using student names (94.2%,  $n = 113$ ) and making phatics and salutations (97.5%,  $n = 117$ ). Lastly, for the interactive component, all the peer-response videos (100%,  $n = 120$ ) explicitly referenced the message in the journal video to which they were responding, and participants most frequently complimented others (64.2%,  $n = 77$ ).

One example of a positive response was when a participant, Sara, showed agreement and complimented her peer on how well he could power through classes and cook for himself afterwards, saying:

I totally understand your situation with the time difference because I remember that in the first two weeks of my classes I had multiple headaches by staying up late for classes. And also I think it's really cool that you've learned how to cook for yourself and that you are cooking in the middle of the night because I don't even have courage to cook for myself at night after my classes. I go to sleep and only after that I wake up and have energy to cook for myself and eat.

Another example was found in showing appreciation and respect toward peers' professional interests and artwork. One participant, Jane, admired a peer's artwork and expressed interest in further conversation:

I just want to say that I think it's so cool that you're majoring in animation. I myself am also a big fan of animation. Whether it is 2D or 3D or any sort of style, I think it's so amazing and mind boggling. I think you are very talented ... I think it's such an amazing career goal. What is the latest work you have been working on? I'd love to learn more about your work in the future.

These examples show how participants successfully demonstrated social presence, and that these interactions helped in the development of a CoI among classmates who studied in a distance-learning context.

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to understand how social presence and community learning can be strengthened during remote teaching by using video-based APMC. Findings illustrate that students were invested in using Flipgrid to communicate with fellow students. For example, the average length of journal videos was 85 seconds, nearly reaching the maximum recording time limit

set by the instructor, which indicates participants used the maximum allowed time talking about the topic and sharing their personal stories.

Going beyond video information, positive emotions were highlighted in both journal and peer-response videos. First, as part of research question 1, we examined emotional characteristics and found that the *positive facial expression* category had the highest percentage of occurrence within the journal videos. The majority of positive facial expressions were displays of contentment, followed by smiles. Considering that creating these videos was the only way to interact with peers in an ACMC learning community, students used positive emotions to leave a good impression and show enthusiasm, encouraging others to connect with them. Moreover, these frequent positive expressions can indicate that students were highly aware of their viewers and their online learning environment; however, it could also be due to the general tendency of users to try to look nice and positive when recording a digital video that will be viewed by others. While this behavior could be influenced by individuals' different technological skills or cultural backgrounds, many students tend to express a positive image of themselves on social media (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020).

Although students were actively using many different expressions, there were also features that were not frequently used. With respect to facial cues, one of the least used expressions was directly gazing into the camera to make eye contact, which can be explained by students not being accustomed to looking into a camera. This implies that even in the digital age, many individuals are still not comfortable making "eye contact," but instead tend to look at themselves on the screen. This finding can suggest that while recording these videos helps students to raise their self-awareness and reflect on their presence, at the same time they are less attentive to communicating and connecting with their audience. However, it could also be that students lack the digital literacy to know that they need to gaze at the camera to have the "eye contact." Being aware of social and emotional cues from interlocutors is a crucial aspect of communication, especially during times of disruption, and instructors can help students to recognize and practice these skills. Because participants were able to view each other's responses, they focused more on verbal awareness such as accuracy, articulation, and pronunciation, rather than using digital features to express their emotions. This may explain the lack of digital feature use compared to text-based communication, which often uses features like emojis in order to compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction (Fornara & Lomicka, 2019).

Regarding the message level in journal videos, the high amount of self-disclosure to their peers may be because participants were prompted to respond to different journal entry themes about their lives in the target language to engage in conversation, but the depth of the personal stories was an intriguing

finding. The fact that participants had shared experiences of a pandemic, likely for the first time, helped them to gain mutual understanding by sharing their personal information. This video discussion platform serves as a scaffolding tool and an outlet for expressing opinions and emotions, enabling students to document details of their lives (Bazarova & Choi, 2014; Fornara & Lomicka, 2019). For example, participants most frequently talked about “passion related to their personal interests” in the *messages about love* category, where they shared their social media handles and recommended K-pop and Kazakh music for others to listen to.

With regard to the category of *messages about dealing with negativity*, the journal videos show more content about students’ experience dealing with personal obstacles or struggles and dealing with the pandemic. For the *messages about personal stories* category, school-related issues were the most frequent theme. This particular topic successfully bonded students together through shared experiences such as taking online courses, being isolated at home without friends, and taking classes in the middle of the night due to time differences. These shared experiences brought them closer together, and while relating to other people’s struggles they showed support by sharing advice or acknowledging their situations. For the cohesive level, the *phatics and salutations* category had the highest percentage, which indicates that participants were trying to show politeness and friendliness toward their peers.

Research question 2 asked about the same components, but in peer-response videos. For emotions, results from peer-response videos were similar to those for journal videos. For instance, participants frequently used positive facial expressions, but had a lack of direct gaze and reluctance in using digital features. This could be because participants lacked the knowledge of digital literacy that they need to gaze at the camera to have “eye contact.” While previous literature showed that these non-verbal cues could reduce the psychological distance between the interlocutors and enhance social presence, learners’ use of social cues could also be influenced by their technology skills, personal preference of using technology features, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Satar, 2015, 2020). For instance, cultural background could affect learners’ online communication experience: learners from more collectivistic cultures representing mostly Eastern countries have different online communication styles than learners from more individualistic cultures, which could affect the way they express and present themselves (Kim & Dindia, 2011). Another interesting result comes from students’ lack of use of humor, especially irony and sarcasm, when they were responding to their peers. This may indicate that they were trying to be kind and show empathy while responding to other peers’ stories during the pandemic.

For messages in peer-response videos, the “passion related to their personal interests” item had the highest percentage in peer videos in the *messages about love* category. Even though students were responding to their peers, they were also invested in talking about themselves. In a way, they were using the peer videos as a tool to disclose information about themselves and invite others to connect with them. For the *messages about personal stories* category, school-related issues were again the most frequent topic, similar to the journal videos. At the message level, the video that had the most replies contained fun anecdotes about escaping pandemic life, and other students then shared similar stories about learning to make pancakes during quarantine or playing video games during this stressful time. Knowing that other peers had encountered similar difficulties validated their experiences and made them feel that they were not alone (Liu & Dong, 2019). These dialogues demonstrate participants’ higher levels of social presence through self-disclosure, which supports previous research findings that learners may be less self-conscious about saving face in online settings compared to face-to-face contexts (Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2016; McNeil, 2014; Sykes, 2005).

The interactive level was exclusively used to identify interactions within peer-response videos. One significant finding is that all peer responses referred explicitly to others’ messages. They responded to their peers by explicitly referring to the stories and incidents mentioned in the videos, and expanded the conversation based on the initial content. For instance, one participant, Ana, talked about not being able to attend senior prom, but since she self-identified as an introvert she actually felt relieved. In the peer responses, participants not only shared general prom experiences, but also shared creative and alternative ways of having proms and talked about what being introverts themselves meant for them during the pandemic. The second most frequent item was expressing agreement, followed by complimenting and expressing appreciation. For example, participants shared their experience of studying online while staying in their home countries during the pandemic. One major obstacle was staying awake until three or four in the morning to take synchronous classes.

For the cohesive level, the *phatics and salutations* category also had the highest percentage in the peer-response videos, similar to the journal videos. Due to restrictive regulations during the pandemic, participants seized every opportunity to practice speaking the target language and engage in social interaction. The *name reference* category shows that 94.2% of the peer-response videos addressed their peers by name. It is important for participants to try to relate to their interlocutors by referring to their names, particularly for learners from diverse backgrounds. Learning to pronounce each other’s names shows respect and further increases social presence and connection to their

peers, leading to a positive impact on group cohesion (Murphy, 2004; Satar & Akcan, 2018).

### 5.1 Implications, Limitations, and Future Studies

While the results of this study show how video-based ACMC can have a positive impact on social presence, there are several pedagogical implications and limitations that could be addressed in future studies within the context of emergency remote language teaching. One limitation is that this study is based on a small sample size in one course; therefore, future studies should investigate this model in the context of larger populations with students of different language proficiency. The results reveal that Flipgrid can enhance dialogical education, build virtual communities, narrow social distance, and foster engagement (Kleinschmit & Rembold, 2020). However, a limitation is that the conversations seemed forced in these videos because the prompts created in the project led them to focus more on specific themes, which restricted the content they discussed. Future studies should implement key words as prompts rather than asking specific questions, so that students have more freedom to express themselves. To improve motivation and active engagement, instructors could ask students to generate their own themes and topics that they are interested in sharing, so that the conversation could be more diverse and inclusive.

Another limitation of this study is that it does not analyze participants' perspectives on video-based ACMC. Because social presence could also be reflected by how interlocutors feel connected to their community from their own perspectives, future studies could include open-ended questionnaires or interviews to explore more in-depth student views. As a pedagogical suggestion, instructors could design a final discussion task that asks students to reflect on their perceptions and experiences of this project.

Although language learners frequently used positive facial expressions, the findings showed that they had a lack of direct gaze and limited use of digital features. An implication of this finding is that instructors can help students to understand and practice more digital literacy and skills within the video-based CMC context before recording their assignments, so that students are more familiar with the platform and are able to better utilize its affordances for better communication.

## 6. Conclusion

This study investigated how video-based ACMC contributed to developing a meaningful virtual community of learners among first-year international

students studying during the pandemic. While educators are busy transitioning face-to-face curricula to fully online, it is also critical to create a space for ELLs to engage and connect with each other and form a sense of community. Over one semester's journal project, ELLs communicated with their peers in the target language, shared personal stories, and practiced speaking skills outside of class meetings through the video discussion platform. With the limited empirical research focusing on video-based ACMC, our study contributes to the literature by drawing on the social presence framework to examine the ways in which a video discussion platform can provide an SEL environment during a disruption in traditional practices. Results show ELLs achieved this goal in a variety of ways: expressing high levels of self-disclosure and positive facial expressions, showing social and emotional support when referring explicitly to others' messages, expressing agreement, and complimenting each other, to highlight just a few examples.

As ELLs bond with their peers through shared experiences and interests, showing empathy, and providing advice and admiration, they gain trust and a sense of belonging to the community. Although technology cannot replace face-to-face interaction, video discussion platforms offer a valuable alternative, particularly during disruptive times. With the rapidly changing situation during the pandemic, ways of making connections and forming relationships have drastically shifted. Due to the new social and emotional challenges that have emerged, educators should continue to create opportunities for social interactions and community building in and outside of the language classroom. The results of this study demonstrate how video-based ACMC can help to accomplish this goal.

## **Acknowledgments**

The authors wish to thank the anonymous reviewers as well as the issue's guest editors for their insightful comments and suggestions.

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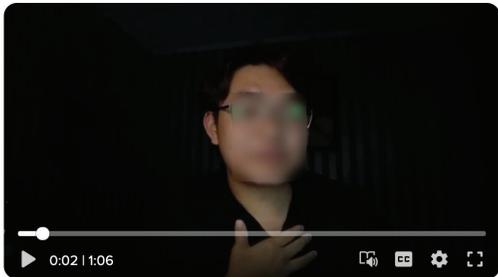
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## Appendix A: Examples of Social Presence Coding in Video Content

Level	Variable	Example
Affective	Positive stickers/emojis	 <p>My life during the pandemic <span>3</span>      Nov 18 <span>2</span></p>
	Direct gaze	
	Humor	<p>"I am a stress eater too [laughed]! I eat a lot when I feel stressed. In my senior year in high school, when I was preparing for college, I gained 10 pounds because I just kept feeling hungry [smiled]."</p>

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**Message**


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Message about love	“Hello everyone, my name is (student’s name), and I would like to share some facts that I realized about myself during this pandemic and some experiences that I had. The first one is that I had an online graduation. It was interesting because I never had an online event before. And the second thing is that I realized that I have a crazy weird obsession with pancakes. I love pancakes. I love cooking them and I love eating them.”
Messages about dealing with negativity	“When this whole pandemic started, I was actually in Chicago. I had to go back home and it was a crazy ride back to Hungary because they had closed the borders so I had to go through a land border. It was a pretty messy ride. I was dealing with some mental health issues at the time, and I had to be in quarantine for two weeks. The quarantine was really stressful for me.”
Messages about personal stories	“During the pandemic, at night, I watched a lot of cooking videos on YouTube, made a list of ingredients, and gave it to my mom everyday so she bought all of them for me. Due to the time differences, I really enjoy studying at night. No one can disturb me by sending messages. The whole city is very quiet so I can concentrate more on what I do.”

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**Cohesive**


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Name reference	“Hey (student’s name), I think you would not be shy after we get familiar with each other. And I like princesses too. My favorite princess is Elsa. And hope one day, I can have a chance to see and hear you sing.”
Addressing the group	“Hi, my name is (student’s name) and I’m going to share my ups and downs. For downs, my sleeping schedule for the past few weeks is kind of a mess because the daylight savings time is over and sometimes I cannot sleep for like two days and sometimes I sleep through the whole day, and it is kind of annoying and exhausting. I think it is very hard for all of us international students who are overseas studying in the class ... It is nice to share the ups and downs with you guys.”
Phatics and salutations	“Hi (student’s name), it is really cool. You have been living in Chicago for a year, and I think it’s adorable that you can order food from Chinatown and enjoy it. And I would like to ask, do you like your hometown or do you like Chicago more? Why? Take care. Bye.”

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**Interactive**

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Quoting	"Hey (student's name). I also liked jogging at night before the pandemic. I just stay at home now. You said, 'you just walk around at night and take some public transportation to find some interesting places.' So my question is could you just share your story of your adventures at night? And what places in your city do you recommend? Thank you."
Explicit message reference	"Hello (student's name), the issue you mentioned about stress eating is also my problem. I eat a lot when I feel stressed too. Like in my senior year of high school when I was preparing to apply for college. I gained five kilograms because I just keep feeling hungry. So I'm glad that you have your own way to deal with it. It's good for you."
Asking questions	"Hey, I think it is a very weird and also horrible story. I've never had the chance to take the plane by myself and I'm curious how it feels? Do you feel lonely?"
Complimenting	"Hey (student's name), I think you are already a perfect English speaker. I think I've told you before and I think it is nice for you to have such a great plan for your future. And good luck with everything and just keep working in the right direction."
Expressing agreement	"Hey (student's name), I do agree that playing video games is a good way to release stress. I do that too. What is your favorite video game? Can you recommend me some? That would be great."

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