【原著】

Students' Perceptions of Showbie as a Learning Management System in a Language Course

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語学コースにおいて学習管理システムとしての ショービーに対する学生の見識

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Abstract

The present study attempts to examine EFL learners' attitudes towards using Showbie as a Learning Management System (LMS) in a language course. Participants were 260 first-year students studying General English at the Bunkyo English Communication Centre (BECC) at Hiroshima Bunkyo University in Japan. Students were given an iPad Self-efficacy questionnaire coupled with a Showbie Perceptions and Attitudes survey. The purpose of this research was to explore student perceptions of this newly adopted LMS as it pertained to ease of use and perceived usefulness. Findings revealed positive indicators regarding the potential for Showbie in a language learning context as a platform to support both face-to-face and online learning. The study provides language teachers with insights into the implementation of Showbie in a language learning context.

Introduction

The year 2020 gave birth to an unprecedented pandemic which brought an emergency paradigm shift in teaching and learning at all levels of education across the globe. This paradigm shift dramatically altered the landscape in many educational spheres and consequently, teaching and learning styles have been evolving even more rapidly along with the tools to accommodate these new modes of learning. In particular, many witnessed a transfer from face-to-face teaching to online teaching that forced many educators to frantically adapt to this new global context through e-learning modalities utilizing various technologies to support these new paperless endeavours. Even prior to the pandemic, there was already high growth and adoption in technology related to education, with global investments reaching US$18.66 billion in 2019 (2019 Global Edtech, 2019) and the online education market reaching "US$ 350 Billion by 2025, globally due to the introduction of flexible learning technologies" (Online Education Market, 2019). Whether it is language learning apps, video conferencing tools, or Learning Management Systems (LMS), there has been a substantial swell in educational technologies since the pandemic began.

Owing to the pandemic, the BECC adopted a more flexible learning model that carefully integrated face-to-face and online learning. This mode of learning, termed BlendFlex (blended + flexible), allows all students to experience the same blend of online (asynchronous) and in-person (synchronous) activities. BlendFlex was pioneered by a technical college in Georgia in an endeavour to provide services to both students lacking local access to instructional content and to students who are uncomfortable with online instruction (Snelgrove, 2019). The flexible aspect of BlendFlex is that students can take part either face-to-face or online depending on their circumstances. During a pandemic, this modality offers students in locations of high viral spread the option to continue the course online at home and in the case of a lockdown, classes can easily be held entirely online. The Showbie application was selected and integrated into the curriculum as a core tool to support the BlendFlex model.

Showbie Application

Showbie is perhaps best described as a Learning Management System or LMS. LMSs are defined as "web-based technologies and applications that plan, create, manage, and deliver course content, activities, and assignments" (Lemanski, 2019). Showbie is a cross-platform application used by teachers to assign, collect, and review student work. Showbie CEO & Co-Founder, Colin Bramm, refers to the Showbie platform as "a Lighter Learning Management System", which "borrows the idea of a broader platform that does most things teachers need while ensuring the system is relevant for today's 1:1 classroom needs." (Bramm, 2016). Showbie is quickly gaining popularity with more than 700 school districts and 28,500 teachers using the LMS to manage their classrooms (Learning Counsel, 2019).

According to the Showbie website: "Showbie combines all of the essential tools for assignments, feedback and communication in one beautiful, easy-to-use app." (Showbie, 2021).
In fact, Showbie contains a plethora of features that go far beyond simply assigning and turning in work digitally. Showbie gives users the ability to store and share documents that can be annotated utilizing a digital pen, text boxes, and embedded voice notes. Using the pro version of Showbie, teachers can host online discussions, create private group chats, and have students collaborate on projects both synchronously and asynchronously. Showbie's prime feature is arguably its annotation capabilities. Showbie makes it easy to give rich, differentiated feedback to students. All annotations are time stamped making it clear when a document has been altered and push notifications can be set up and customized. Educators can share assignments and messages with all students at one time or share items with only certain students by adding documents to a student's individual folder (see Figures 1 & 2). Student folders are a great place to share grades, feedback, and extra instructional materials.

One of Showbie's most touted features is its built-in e-portfolio system. According to Madden (2008), a student e-portfolio is "an archive of material, relating to an individual, held in a digital format" (p. 5). Showbie makes it easy for either students or teachers to star digital items such as assignments, reports, slides, video presentations, and audio files. Once an item is starred it is

added to the student's portfolio for easy access. At the Bunkyo English Communication Center (BECC), Showbie portfolios are used to store a record of a student's grades along with assessment feedback and learner reflections. The Showbie portfolio serves to enhance learning through reflection and to help students manage their learning outcomes so as to build a more enriched learning experience.

When it comes to security, Showbie is arguably an extremely safe and secure platform thanks to all communication being controlled and monitored by the teacher. For example, students can only contact each other privately through the teacher and all online discussions and private group chats are created and monitored by the teacher. Furthermore, Showbie enables teachers to invite parents to view their child's portfolio or give them complete access to assignment notifications and feedback. Teachers can also invite one or more co-teachers to a class. In other words, Showbie offers educators a safe and secure online classroom management space. The screenshots below may serve to better illustrate the aforementioned features. All screenshots were taken with permission from Showbie.
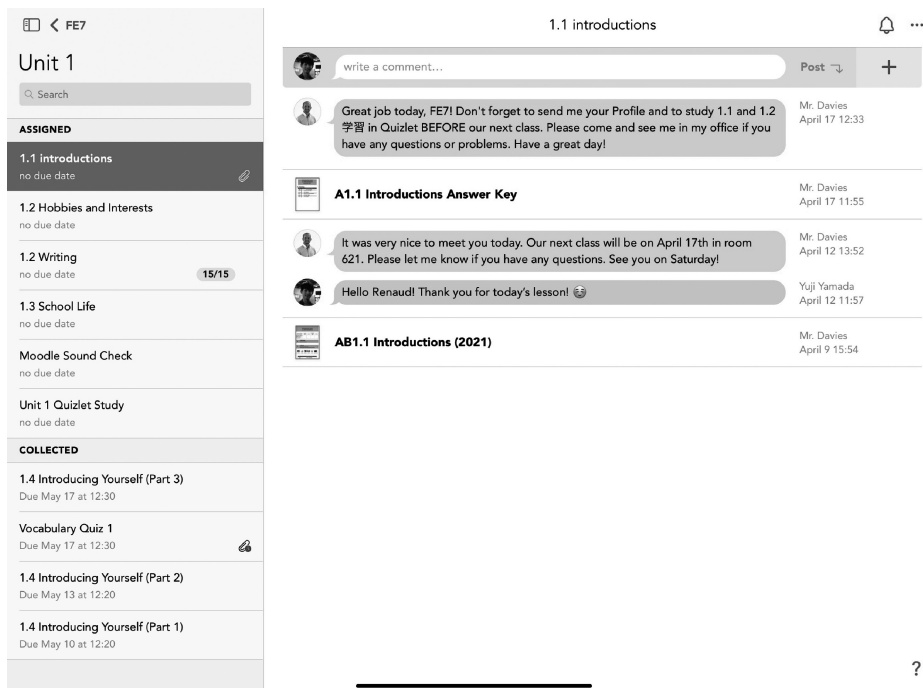

Figure 1: Showbie Chat Page

Figure 2: Showbie Discussion Page

Figure 3: Annotating a Document in Showbie

Figure 4: Showbie Portfolio

Please note that the free version of Showbie does not provide users with all the above features. In this study all teachers utilized the pro version of Showbie, which offers unlimited assignments, class discussion, groups, co-teaching, parent access, student portfolios, grades, larger uploads, longer voice notes, and priority customer support. At the time of writing this, Showbie's pricing is divided into three plans:

Basic Edition for Individual Teachers.
This plan is free for one user and allows teachers to organize unlimited classes. It comes with pre-loaded assignments and lesson plans, along with annotation tools.

Pro Edition for Individual Teachers.
This plan costs $199/year or $16.99 per month (USD). The plan features unlimited assignments, a grade book, a student portfolio, a class discussion forum, parental access, annotation tools, plus all of the features of the Basic Edition.

Pro Edition for Schools and Districts.
This plan includes all of the features of the Pro Edition, plus unlimited basic access for all users, with the addition of access to a school admin management system, school training resources, and provided tech support for advanced activities such as importing and account linking.

For more details regarding the above Showbie plans, please visit www.showbie.com.

To the author's knowledge, only one study has been conducted on Showbie in a language learning context. Abdulaziz Al-Saleh, N. (2018) examined the impact of positive and corrective feedback on English writing using Showbie. The results of the study showed that computer-mediated positive and corrective feedback via Showbie was useful. Although there is a tremendous amount of research on students' perceptions on the use of popular LMSs such as Blackboard, Google Classroom, and Schoology (Al-Nofaie, 2020; Hendrawaty, 2021 & Rojabi, 2019) to support language learners, there is currently no research on students' perceptions of Showbie as an LMS to support a language course. Given this lack of research, this study addresses the following core research question:

What are students' perceptions and attitudes of the Showbie application as a tool to support a BlendFlex learning model in a language course?

Contextual Background

The study was conducted at a small private university in Japan where all students own an iPad mini. Participants were 260 first-year students studying General English - a required course taught by 8 full-time English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers. The General English curriculum is a task-based curriculum that was developed in-house and which is taught via an iPad with the majority of students being between CEFR levels A1 and A2. Showbie was used as a bedrock tool to support this digital curriculum and newly integrated BlendFlex learning model.

Setting Up Showbie
The Showbie application was downloaded by all students during the first week of classes with all General English teachers dedicating approximately 30 minutes of class time in person to setting up the application and teaching students how to use it. All Showbie training was done in English by the teacher; however, the application's language was in Japanese for students and a Showbie video guide in Japanese was provided. As the pro version of Showbie is only paid by the instructor, students did not need to pay anything for the application and no special upgrade was required. Students simply downloaded the application, created a student account, and then joined their class via a class code, which was shared by their teacher.

Student Use of Showbie

1. Lessons and assignments
All class work such as lessons PDFs, activities, and links were delivered to students in Showbie. All General English students were required to submit their lesson work at the end of each class. This was especially crucial in the case of students doing the class online as a late submission was considered an absence. Lessons could be completed within Showbie using the digital pen or text tool or they could be completed using another application which allows for annotation such as Notability. Applications such as Keynote and PowerPoint for creating slideshows and iMovie for creating movies were also used and shared to Showbie. All completed work was submitted through each student's private Showbie assignment page where they were then checked,

annotated upon and graded by the teacher. All uploaded and edited documents as well as posted messages are timestamped, which allowed teachers to easily confirm that assignments and activities were completed on time.

2. Communication

Every assignment created in Showbie allows for private text and voice messaging between the student and the teacher. These chat pages allow students to ask their teacher questions directly within their own private assignment. There is also a class discussion page that allows students to share documents and post comments/questions to the entire class. These pages were often utilized by teachers to post announcements and reminders to the class or to contact students individually regarding grades, feedback, reminders, and so on. Furthermore, Showbie allows for push notifications, meaning that a user receives a pop-up message and or audio alert when a change is made, or a message is posted. The chat pages also report the time and date beneath every posted message and document that was edited or uploaded.

3. Collaboration

The General English curriculum is a task-based curriculum with several group projects. Showbie serves as an excellent platform for supporting such collaborative projects as it allows students to join a private group created and monitored by the teacher where they can communicate and share ideas among group members both synchronously and asynchronously. Furthermore, some assignments such as video and slideshow presentations were uploaded to the class discussion page where they could be viewed by all members of the class. Documents uploaded to the class discussion page can be viewed by all class members; however, other members cannot directly edit, comment, or annotate upon such documents.

4. Digital Portfolio

As previously mentioned, Showbie is used at the BECC as an e-portfolio system allowing students to safely store a record of their grades and feedback in an endeavour to encourage learner reflection and lifelong learning. Students can easily add any document to their portfolio by simply tapping a star icon, which is located next to every Showbie document. During the course of their study, students were given feedback digitally on every assessment, which they stored in their Showbie portfolio. Feedback provided students with their CEFR level and recommended extracurricular study based on their results. Extracurricular study could be done at the Self Access Learning Center (SALC), which is located in the BECC.

Method

This section covers student data collection, procedure, analysis and results with the following two research questions having been posited:

1. What are students' perceptions of the iPad as a tool to support learning?
2. What are students' perceptions and attitudes of the Showbie iPad application as a tool to support

a BlendFlex learning model in a language course?

Student data collection, procedure, and analysis

The researcher developed a 24-item survey with 21 of the items utilizing a six-point Likert scale. The survey was completed by 260 first-year students during class time. The survey required informed consent and was in Japanese to make sure students fully understood the content of the questionnaire. It included four subcategories: (a) iPad self-efficacy (10 items), (b) Integration of Showbie in the English course (5 items), (c) User friendliness of the Showbie application (6 items), and (d) Devices used to access Showbie (3 items). In an attempt to increase measurement precision and avoid a middle category, which can cause statistical problems, a six-point likert scale was chosen in accordance with Nemoto and Beglar's (2014) guidelines for developing a Likert-scale questionnaire. Participants were asked to rate their agreement on the scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree).

Results and Discussion: *A quantitative and qualitative interpretation*

Table 1. *iPad self-efficacy (n = 260)*

No	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	M
1	It is easy to learn how to use an iPad.	0.76%	3.05%	8.4%	28.63%	42.75%	16.41%	4.59
2	I can deal with most difficulties I encounter when using an iPad.	1.15%	5.73%	16.79%	37.02%	28.63%	10.69%	4.18
3	I am confident in my abilities to use an iPad.	4.58%	8.02%	26.34%	30.15%	22.14%	8.78%	3.84
4	Most of the iPad applications I have had experience with have been easy to use.	1.53%	4.96%	10.69%	30.15%	40.84%	11.83%	4.39
5	The iPad helps me to be more efficient.	0.76%	1.53%	6.49%	27.10%	40.08%	24.05%	4.76
6	I enjoy learning with an iPad.	1.53%	1.53%	4.58%	26.72%	43.13%	22.52%	4.76
7	I enjoy using an iPad in English class.	1.91%	1.15%	4.20%	25.19%	43.51%	24.05%	4.79
8	iPads are good tools for engaging students.	1.53%	1.53%	3.05%	22.14%	42.75%	29.01%	4.90
9	iPads enhance English learning materials.	1.15%	3.44%	4.58%	25.57%	42.37%	22.90%	4.73
10	iPads facilitate my learning.	1.91%	3.05%	6.87%	25.57%	40.84%	21.76%	4.66
	Total Mean Average							4.56

Research Question 1: What are students' perceptions of the iPad as a tool to support learning?

Results clearly show that students hold positive perceptions of the iPad both in terms of user-friendliness and as a tool to bolster learning engagement. In fact, item 8, "iPads are good tools for engaging students", received the highest mean. Conversely, item 2, "I can deal with most difficulties I encounter when using an iPad." and item 3, "I am confident in my abilities to use an iPad." scored the lowest means. This low confidence is of little surprise given the fact that the students' previous learning experiences are almost entirely analog. Furthermore, the general English course is heavily digital as it incorporates numerous technologies such as Microsoft

Teams, Moodle, Keynote (Apple's version of PowerPoint), Quizlet and more. It is therefore expected that many students would feel technologically overwhelmed. Overall, the results strongly indicate that students think very positively of the iPad as a tool to facilitate learning and increase engagement. Finally, it should be noted that the survey was taken at the end of the first semester, which means that students would have had one full semester (four months) experience with the iPad and the Showbie application. A follow-up survey at the end of semester 2 may render much more positive results regarding confidence in using the iPad.

In summary, a total average mean of 4.56 shows that the students in this study have a positive perception of the iPad. This positive result may owe to the fact that all students own their iPad and are free to bring the iPad home for personal use. This first survey was a crucial component of the analysis as self-efficacy is linked to beliefs about mastery and usability of technology and thus, a good indicator for students' acceptance of technology in the classroom (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010). If students have low iPad self-efficacy, this must be considered when examining survey results on their perception of the Showbie iPad application. Fortunately, the iPad self-efficacy survey yielded quite positive results, which means students' responses on the Showbie survey were not negatively influenced in any significant way due to their opinions of the iPad.

Table 2. *Integration of Showbie in an English course (n = 260)*

No	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	M
11	Showbie helps improve the teacher-student relationship in a course.	0.38%	0.38%	9.62%	33.08%	39.62%	16.92%	4.62
12	Showbie helps to improve the student-student relationship in a course.	1.92%	6.15%	22.69%	30.77%	28.46%	10.00%	4.08
13	Showbie makes a course more successful.	0.00%	1.15%	4.23%	38.08%	38.46%	18.08%	4.68
14	Showbie facilitates my learning.	0.38%	0.77%	5.38%	35.38%	40.00%	18.08%	4.68
15	I like using Showbie in English class.	0.77%	2.31%	8.08%	39.23%	34.23%	15.38%	4.50
	Total Mean Average							4.5

Table 3. *User friendliness of Showbie application (n = 260)*

No	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	M
16	Showbie is easy to use.	0.38%	1.92%	3.46%	31.15%	45.77%	17.31%	4.72
17	The Showbie chat function is easy to use.	1.92%	3.46%	16.54%	28.08%	32.31%	17.69%	4.38
18	The Showbie digital pen is easy to use.	1.92%	5.77%	17.31%	31.54%	31.54%	11.92%	4.21
19	The Showbie text box is easy to use.	2.69%	2.69%	16.54%	35.38%	31.92%	10.77%	4.23
20	Showbie voice notes are easy to use.	1.92%	1.15%	9.23%	34.23%	36.92%	16.54%	4.53
21	It is easy to share lessons and other files to Showbie.	0.38%	0.77%	5.38%	26.54%	40.77%	26.15%	4.85
	Total Mean Average							4.48

Table 4. *Devices used to access Showbie (n = 260)*

No	Items	No	Yes
22	I use Showbie on an iPad.	1.15% 3	98.85% 257
23	I use Showbie on a computer.	91.92% 239	8.08% 21
24	I use Showbie on a smartphone / iPhone.	81.54% 212	18.46% 48

Research question 2: What are students' perceptions and attitudes of the Showbie iPad application as a tool to support a BlendFlex learning model in a language course?

The total mean of items 11- 15, which pertain to the integration of Showbie in a language course, was 4.5. Students agreed that the application helped to improve the course and their learning. This can be seen with item 13, "Showbie helps to make a course more successful" and item 14 "Showbie facilitates my learning", which both had a mean of 4.68. Interestingly, students agreed that the Showbie application improved the teacher-student relationship in the course as can be seen by item 11, which had a mean of 4.62; however, item 12 reveals that students did not feel as strongly regarding the improvement of the student-student relationship in a course, which had a lesser mean of 4.08. For items, 16–21 which relate to the applications user-friendliness, there was a total mean of 4.48. Item 21, "It is easy to share lessons and other files to Showbie" received the highest mean in this section with 4.85. The second highest was item 16, "Showbie is easy to use", which scored 4.72. In fact, the majority of comments on the survey were positive as can be seen below:

Showbie is convenient because it is easy to submit assignments.

Showbie is easy to use!

I like being able to draw in Showbie.

Submitting assignments is easy.

It is easy to post comments and ask questions.

Showbie is convenient on the iPad, but also using a computer is fine.

As for items 17–20, which pertain to specific Showbie functions such as the chat function, digital pen, text box, and voice notes, the results were less positive. In particular, item 18, "The Showbie digital pen is easy to use" scored the lowest mean with only 4.21. This is an important finding as the digital pen is arguably one of the most used features in the Showbie application. Two students reported that their writing would sometimes disappear in Showbie. Some students also reported

that it took a long time to send and receive files using Showbie. For example, one student stated, "I don't like that it can sometimes take a long time to download a file." Nevertheless, the majority of students agreed that the Showbie application is easy and convenient to use. Therefore, it may be that some students had issues with wi-fi either at the university or at their home. A poor connection would result in slow upload and download speeds as well as data glitches when writing digitally in Showbie. It should be further noted that all students were required to purchase and install Notability on their iPad at the start of the year. Notability is an advanced notation tool that can be used offline, and which is used in a variety of different courses at the university. Students were encouraged to use Notability when wi-fi issues arose or if they preferred the advanced annotation features.

Lastly, the final three items on the survey asked students which devices they use to access Showbie. As Showbie is a cross-platform application, students can also access it via their mobile phones or personal computers. As expected, most students (98.85%) accessed Showbie using their iPads. This helps to confirm that the survey data collected regarding students' perceptions of Showbie does indeed pertain to the iPad application, not the mobile or browser-based versions, which offer a different layout and design.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined students' perceptions and attitudes of the Showbie iPad application in a language course. Showbie fulfilled its purpose as a user-friendly tool to support a BlendFlex learning model. The iPad self-efficacy questions confirmed that students were not negatively influenced in any significant way due to their perceptions of the iPad. Survey results also showed that the Showbie iPad application is easy to use, facilitates students' learning, and improved the teacher-student relationship in the course. The application not only served as an excellent means for students to upload, share, and annotate documents easily, but it also functioned well as an e-portfolio system allowing students to easily store their completed assessments and assessment feedback.

However, findings revealed that Showbie improved the student-teacher relationship more than the student-student relationship. Item 12, "Showbie helps to improve the student-student relationship in a course", received the lowest mean. One student stated that "In Showbie I think there are less opportunities for students to talk to each other." Since Showbie does not enable students to actively communicate with each other independently of the teacher, students may have felt that Showbie's communication structure is not conducive to social learning. Furthermore, activities on Showbie tended to be very teacher-student centered. For example, activities and assignments were submitted through each student's personal Showbie folder where they were then checked, annotated upon and graded by the teacher. As for the class discussion page, it was often utilized by teachers to post announcements and reminders to the class. Comments by students in the class discussion page were generally restricted to teacher generated tasks such as responding to discussion questions or commenting on other students' shared work. It is also important to note

that a fair amount of class time was dedicated to letting students work with group members on collaborative projects via video chat on Microsoft Teams lessening the need to collaborate within Showbie.

As for Showbie functions, it was discovered that item 18, "The Showbie digital pen is easy to use" scored 4.21, which was the lowest mean. As Showbie annotations are done in the cloud, students with poor internet connection would have had more annotation issues. To account for this, students were not required to annotate within the Showbie application - all students had access to a dedicated annotation application called Notability. However, it is not clear what percentage of the students opted to use Notability when annotating their lessons and other documents. Therefore, the author calls for further investigation into the effectiveness of the Showbie annotation tools, in particular, the digital pen.

In conclusion, a follow-up study once students have become more confident in utilizing Showbie and the various other tools that are used in conjunction with the application, may provide very different results. Ideally, such a study would aim to encourage students to collaborate more outside of class on Showbie and integrate more activities that require student-student interaction within Showbie. Furthermore, it should require students to annotate documents within Showbie as this would shed more light on the effectiveness of Showbie's annotation tools. Lastly, another study on teachers' perceptions of Showbie would provide educators with even more insights into the implementation of Showbie in a language learning context.

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