

# USING NEW TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL FOR PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN ESL

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Growing up, I was an English Second Language learner who strongly disliked English. I experienced first-hand how having a real life end goal and being allowed to be creative in one's use of a foreign language can be beneficial for one's motivation. Nowadays, with the expansion of the GIGA school program, it is becoming increasingly easier (and strongly encouraged) to use new technology in the classroom. One way to combined all these elements is by using online platforms and videomaking technology as tools for project-based language learning in our schools.

## Advantages Of Doing Video Projects

1. Video projects can be done both inside and outside the classroom.
2. Video projects are easy to personalize and adapt to various English levels.
3. Videomaking is a good skill to have for the future. Nowadays, many jobs require at least basic knowledge of the Internet and of media production. The demand will probably only keep increasing in the coming years, which might give an advantage to these students over other applicants / employees. Furthermore, because they are videos, these projects can be preserved for later application to programs / portfolios.
4. Video projects allow interactions with non-Japanese speakers for real-life communication. Joto Senior High School has a sister school in France, but because of the time difference between France and Japan, it it impossible for our students to speak to French students directly in video conference during class.
5. Video projects allow students to work on several English skills within the same project, depending on the requirements.

Reading ->	Speaking ->
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading a story in English -&gt;</li><li>• Reading and/or memorizing a script in English -&gt;</li><li>• Doing research on English websites / with provided material written in English -&gt;</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Asking or answering interview questions in English -&gt;</li><li>• Acting / speaking / voice-over (learning text by heart, improvisation or reading aloud) -&gt;</li><li>• Watching videos made and discussing them in class afterwards -&gt;</li></ul>
Writing ->	Listening ->
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Writing a story, script, interview questions, etc. in English -&gt;</li><li>• Translating and writing subtitles in English and/or Japanese -&gt;</li><li>• Writing comments / feedback about videos in class or online -&gt;</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listening to interview questions and answers -&gt;</li><li>• Listening to and memorizing the right intonation for a dialogue -&gt;</li><li>• Listening to other students during a dialogue to know when they need to speak -&gt;</li><li>• Doing a quiz in class based on the students' videos -&gt;</li></ul>

## Disadvantages Of Doing Video Projects

1. Lack of technology: although each student should be equipped with tablets thanks to the GIGA project, technology is not always reliable. For example, some tablets were

*Examples of how to include various English skills.*

broken or stopped working properly after a few weeks. The Internet network is also sometimes too slow or unavailable depending on the location of the classroom and on how many students use it at the same time. In some cases, it is possible to use the students' smartphones, but not every student has access to a smartphone and data that they can use at school.

2. Lack of knowledge: many Japanese students are not familiar with these technologies, so there can be a steep learning curve at the beginning for some of them.
3. Lack of time: video production, and especially video editing, can be extremely time-consuming. This means it can require a lot a planning and some flexibility when trying out a new video project for the first time.

### Example of Project: Club Activities

Let's start by having a look at how we can use video in the context of club activities.

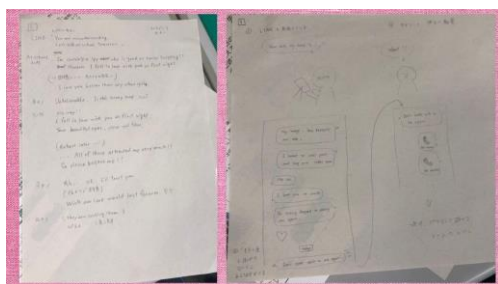
Since club activities usually last longer than English lessons, it's easier to do bigger, more complicated projects. Furthermore, since these projects do not have to be evaluated, the students can have more freedom in the length and topic of their videos.

SPY OF MY HEART was started in May 2022 and presented at Joto's school festival in September 2022. It is a 11m27s fiction film starring 8 Foreign Language Club members as main and supporting characters, as well as former club members and other students as extras.



First, the students had to vote on which kind of video they wished to create. They were given the choice between doing a documentary / promotional video about Tokushima or a fictional narrative.

Once they chose fiction, they had to choose one or more genre(s) from a provided list. To make it

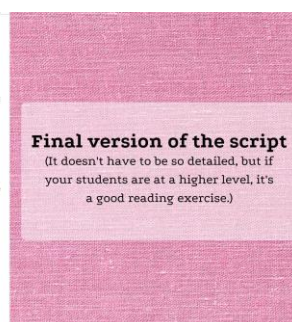
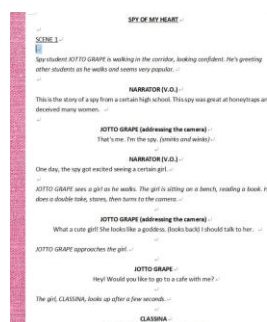


fair, we made the students vote secretly for their two most preferred genres. In the end, we kept the three most popular ones: comedy, romance and mystery/spy.

Then, the students spent a few weeks on creating the story. They first designed the characters and picked the main events of the storyline has a big group, then split the different scenes to be written in smaller groups.

To make it easier to follow during filming, I collected the students' notes once they finished and organized them into a typed, clean version of the script.

The students chose the filming locations, bought all the necessary props and prepared the costumes, then we created a filming schedule for summer vacation. Since we wanted to finish the film in time to be shown at Joto's school festival, I edited the final



version of the film. However, if one or more students express interest in editing, it's always better for them to do it themselves (with support / feedback from the teachers).

We finally showed the film during Joto's school festival. We created a theater-like space where



visitors could sit and watch. We chose to put the film on loop, which removed the need for someone to be there to restart the film every time. However, this had the disadvantage that visitors often arrived in the middle of the story and had no idea what was happening.

If we do this project again next year, we will instead create a schedule with set times so that visitors can plan it into their day and easily catch the film from the beginning.

### **Example of Projects: Real Life English with the 3rd Year Students**

Now, how can we include these kinds of projects in English lessons?

This school year, we focused on videos projects for the Team Teaching portion of our two Real Life English groups. The two groups (composed of respectively 20 and 24 third-year students) meet twice a week. In their other weekly lesson, they usually learn about news using the CNN textbooks.

To make it easier on the students, we provided them with either a video example (that I made beforehand following the evaluation criteria) and/or with useful English expressions for each project. Since most students were not familiar with video editing, we also scaffolded the projects in a way that made it possible for them to learn different editing skills over time.

Between April and December 2022, we managed to do four different video projects: 1. Self-introduction; 2. Introducing a Prefecture; 3. Penpal Exchange with a French Student; 4. Making a News Program.

#### *1. Self-Introduction (30 seconds to 1 minute / 3 lessons)*

For this project, the students had to introduce themselves by answering a certain number of questions from a given list in English. They could edit their videos if they wished to, but were not required to do so. Once all the students submitted their videos, we watched them in class and used them for a listening activity.

#### *2. Introducing a Prefecture (45 seconds to 1 minute 45 seconds / 4 lessons)*

For this project, each student had to choose a prefecture and create a short promotional video to be sent to the students at our sister school in France. They had to identify the location of that prefecture within Japan, then introduce a famous place, a famous food and a famous traditional culture from that prefecture. This time, they had to edit their video to include images, voice-over narration and background music using the design website Canva.

Most students did very well. Some of them were very creative, including a girl who used various mascots to introduce her information (see image on the right).

However, many students also struggled with balancing the voice-over and the music, making it difficult to hear what they were saying. Therefore, if we do this project again, we concluded it would be important to include explanations about how to balance sound properly in the app on their worksheet.

### Apple rice.



### 3. Penpal Exchange with a French Student (free time; 3 lessons)

Since students at our sister school are studying Japanese, the third project became a penpal exchange. In the first half of the video, our students had to answer the French students' questions in Japanese and include English subtitles.



*A third year student used the scrolling-type introduction employed in Star Wars for part of his video. His face was covered in the picture for sake of anonymity.*

Then, they had to do a Show & Tell in English in the second half of the video. Once again, some students were very creative. For example, one of the boys used the classic Star Wars scrolling-type introduction to talk about his favourite episode and character from the film series.

Unfortunately, because the third year students have their last Team Teaching lesson in December, it was impossible for them to continue the exchange. Instead, we recruited a group of first and second year students who took over the project and will continue the video exchange as an extra-curricular activity until June 2023.

### 4. Making a News Program (group project; 4 to 6 minutes; 5 lessons)

Using all the editing skills and the CNN English news expressions they had acquired since April, the students were put in teams of 4 to make their final project: a news program. Each of them had to create a short news segment on a topic of their choice, whether real or fictional, then edit them to resemble a real news show. At the moment of writing this article, this project was not yet completed, but already seemed very promising.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is true that video projects can be difficult to include into our busy teaching schedules at first, but, in my opinion, the possibilities and long-term advantages are so numerous that we should make it a habit to include these technologies into the classroom as soon as possible.