

Using Real-Life Impacting Task-Based Learning Media Projects in the English Language Classroom to Motivate Learners of Foreign Languages

外国語学習者の動機付けを目的とした英語教室における実生活にインパクトを与えるタスクベースの学習メディア・プロジェクトの活用

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The use of technology in the classroom has many purposes and it is becoming more commonly used in classrooms across Japan. It can be used for creative purposes, lesson note-taking, self-reflection, critical thinking, connecting with your classmates, and even for making connections with the real world. Another such purpose is to motivate our students. Motivating students to want to learn English is a constant challenge. No matter where teachers search, they will always find challenging students who are unmotivated to learn foreign languages. Depending on the learning environment and the students' reasons for wanting (or not wanting) to learn English, the resulting level of motivation will vary widely from student to student. The challenge of motivating each and every student in a class can be extremely difficult. This is especially true here in Tottori Prefecture where many of our students can't see in their immediate environment the importance of English to their daily lives. This is true for all levels of education: primary, middle, secondary, and even higher education. So, what should we do? How can we better motivate our students through the use of technology in order to help them to find a deeper purpose behind their foreign language studies?

In this paper, we would like to introduce the use of technology in the classroom when coupled with real-world impacting projects as a means of motivating students. We would like to introduce a project that was very successful in the Hokuei public schools and suggest it as a viable option for classes at the university level. Students are prompted by a leading question to research and present their findings on an issue or topic. For example, "How can we encourage tourists to visit our prefecture?" or "What projects would you like to see the town support to improve our lives?" All that is required to complete the project is something outside of the classroom that your students wish to impact and an influential figure with the power to make a change at that "something" who is also willing to cooperate with the project. Then, through the use of video recording technology (such as a typical iPad or tablet), you can communicate the students' opinions to this influential figure in order to give this "someone" a new perspective concerning improvements that could be made. This

type of collaboration between the community and the students highly motivated the students in Hokuei to learn the essential language skills necessary for them to accomplish the task in a foreign language. They were able to find a purpose behind their language studies and have a meaningful impact on their community through English.

Through the use of the Task-Based Learning Media Project and technology that we describe below, our students were able to communicate their ideas in English to the influential figure (the Mayor of Hokuei) and make a difference in the real world around them. However, before we explain the project in detail, let's first review some issues related to Task-Based Learning Media Projects that Michale Muller and the other teachers at Fuzoku junior high school on the Tottori University campus ran into when using technology in their foreign language classrooms.

There are three issues related to Task-Based Learning Media Projects in our opinion. (1) The implementation of iPads in junior high school, (2) the implementation of English textbooks used by English language learners in elementary school, and (3) the student experience and capability with using the video technology used in task-based learning projects. These three factors require educators to consider a new vision and new styles of pedagogy in order to motivate students in the ESL classroom at the university level. The students that will be arriving in your classroom and your lecture rooms will not be the same as those from previous years as the above factors start to become consolidated. For this reason, it is useful and beneficial for both students and educators to consider and even try other forms of teaching students which will build on the basic English skills they already have developed in their primary and secondary education.

1. The implementation of iPads in junior high school:

Students at Fuzoku junior high school located on the Tottori University campus grounds have received classroom iPads that students are able to use in class activities. At the junior and senior high school in Perth, Australia where Michael taught before coming to Japan, students received iPads about 8 years ago and were trained on their use in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers received training workshops not only on how to use technology, but also on how to use technology in creative ways. Combined these can lead to great outcomes.

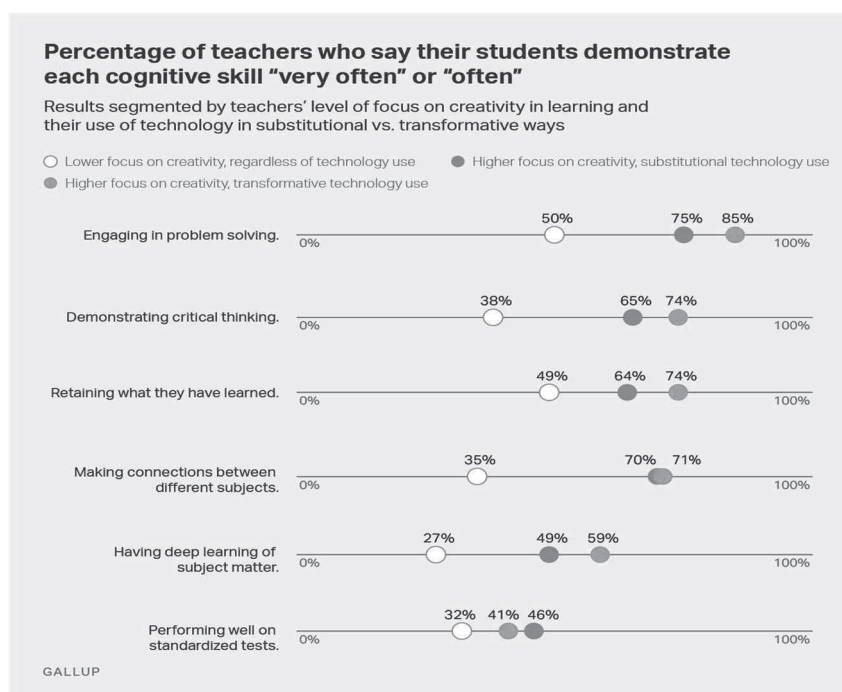
According to a research report by Gallup, students who study in a creative and technology-based environment were more successful at:

- Solving problems
- Thinking critically
- Retaining information
- Exhibiting deeper comprehension

- Making connections across subjects
- Succeeding on standardized tests

This teacher development involved sharing information between teachers about useful applications that teachers could use in their classrooms. It also involved a designated technology support teacher that gave weekly workshops over a period of 6 months to help teachers gain confidence and understanding in the use of the iPads for effective and transformational teaching.

The alternative way of using technology is to teach in the same manner and use the technology as simply a digital notebook. This might give some improvement in motivation but will not be as transformative.



Reference: <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/245600/teachers-promote-creativity-educational-results.aspx>

A Gallup Report called Creativity in Learning finds that teachers who combine creativity together with assignments that make transformative use of technology see even better student outcomes.

Tablets or iPads could be used to create transformative uses of technology such as multimedia projects, conduct research, analyze information, and create complex projects that cross different subject disciplines.

According to the report:

“85% of teachers who focus on creativity in learning and use technology in transformative ways say they often see their students engaging in problem-solving. This drops to 75% among teachers who foster classroom creativity but use technology in more substitutional ways (replacing paper and pencil with tablets or computers to do the same tasks) and to 50% among teachers who maximize neither creativity nor transformative technology in the classroom.”

It is interesting to note that similar improvements are seen in students' increase in critical thinking, retention of material and deeper learning.

2. The implementation of the textbooks used by English language learners in elementary school:

English as a foreign language has been taught in the elementary schools in Japan for many years but, up until two years ago, there wasn't a required textbook. So there was a great variance in implementation of language teaching between different schools. Some had a higher level of EFL instruction and others had less instruction. It is noticeable to us from teaching at the junior high school level that overall student English ability is improving each year and we believe this is due to the above changes. This means that activities such as multimedia projects, conducting research, analyzing information, and creating complex projects that cross different subject disciplines will be more possible to implement and will also be beneficial to student motivation because of their improved skills in basic English compared to their counterparts a couple of years ago. This makes now a particularly exciting time to bring technology into the classroom.

3. Student experiences with video technology for task-based learning:

Implementation of iPads at junior high schools that also have the iMovie application installed means that students can make and edit video productions very easily. An example of this is that a fellow colleague at Fuzoku Junior High School created a google classroom account for each of her classes. She then asked students to record themselves speaking about what they enjoyed most about their summer holidays. It is a simple task but the use of technology seemed to increase student motivation and interest. Due to this technology, students have the opportunity to increase their speaking opportunities in the classroom and it raises the level of challenge for the students and raises the status of speaking in the classroom. It is also a great tool for student self-reflection and provides the students with an opportunity to notice their own pronunciation errors as they listen and watch their recorded selves on video. Also, teachers are provided an opportunity to notice common errors or weaknesses in their students' speaking ability. The two parties can then work together to come up with strategies that can help the students to improve further.

Technology in combination with task-based real world video projects can help to further promote collaboration among students, teachers, and community. For example, students could produce a video audio-based production in groups, such as in the example used in the Hokuei public schools below.

The Hokuei Impact Foreign Language Studies Project:

In Hokuei, the English teachers and sixth-grade elementary school students of the public schools collaborated with the public servants of the Hokuei Government Office's Hokuei Town Planning, Finance and Public Affairs Department (北栄町役場 企画財政課) where Christopher Hollis works, as well as the Hokuei Town Mayor, Mr. Teshima, to impact the future direction of the town. These four parties collaborated in order to give language learning a purpose beyond the classroom. As for how the students impacted the future of Hokuei, they did this through the information communicated to the mayor by the students themselves through English with the use of technology and video production.

To begin, the public servants of the Hokuei Government Office, along with the English teachers of Hojo and Daiei elementary schools, created a "request for ideas" video message from the Hokuei Town Planning, Finance and Public Affairs Department (complete with a closing request from Mayor Teshima) that was recorded in English and edited using iPads. Then the teachers showed this request video to the students. Upon viewing the video message, the students were immediately motivated to reply with their ideas! The teachers then separated the students into groups and had them use their iPads to record videos of themselves giving presentations in English as "letters to the mayor" for ideas on how to improve the town.

The entire process took 4 class periods of 45 minutes each. Thus, a total time of 3 hours. The teachers spent the initial class session showing the "request for ideas" video, placing the students in groups of 4 or 5, and having the students brainstorm their ideas for town improvement. Their homework was to finalize their ideas by the next class.

The teachers spent the second lesson having the students work in groups to practice saying what they wanted to say within the parameters of the target grammar for the lesson (Target grammar: "We want a ~ in Hokuei Town" as well as any previously taught grammar like "We like ~", "We want to ~", etc.). They were asked to practice out loud in groups so that they could each pick the sections of the video presentation that matched each particular student's strengths best in order to raise their confidence and encourage the student group members to support each other's progress (each student said one to two lines from the overall group presentation). The teachers intentionally asked the students to produce language out loud so that they would discover on their own what gaps in knowledge they each had in English. The students were then encouraged to fill the gaps in knowledge (vocabulary words, expressions, etc.) by using dictionaries (both physical and online). The students showed much motivation as they searched and finalized their ideas to the mayor in

English. The teachers supported the students as they prepared for their presentations. Their homework was to look up all words and expressions that they felt they needed to know to express their opinions. The students were very motivated after this lesson.

In the third lesson, the students practiced their presentations, asked any questions that they had, and they were taught how to use the iPads for recording their presentations. The teachers also supported them in other various ways. Some groups were able to move into the actual recording stage of the project. Other groups required more support. The teachers worked with the various groups to make sure everyone was able to reach the project goals. This approach requires the teacher to be flexible as different groups will move at different speeds, which is perfectly fine, but can be a little unnerving for teachers who might be used to all students moving through tasks at the same time. The teacher's role becomes more of an assistant or facilitator rather than an instructor.

In the fourth lesson, after giving the students time to practice, the students actually recorded their videos using their iPads. After recording they did some simple editing on the iMovie application on the iPads and finalized their “ideas to the mayor” videos. These video letters (about 20 in total: 5 from each of 2 classes of 25 students from 2 schools) were then each sent to the Hokuei Town Planning, Finance and Public Affairs Department. The videos were then shown to the mayor for him to gain a new perspective on town planning ideas (the perspective of the children of Hokuei).

After the mayor had viewed all of the videos, the mayor then sent a reply video message to the children in English thanking them for their thoughtful ideas. In his video reply letter, he said that he would consider these ideas when he made his upcoming town improvements. Thus, the students were able to find satisfaction and felt empowered by knowing that their ideas were listened to by an influential person and that their ideas could have an impact on their society. Furthermore, the students saw the purpose behind what it was that they were doing in English.

In a post-project questionnaire, the students mentioned how the video letter project was very motivational. They said that the idea of being able to make an impact on their environment through English was very satisfying. One group even mentioned that they finally understood the purpose of learning English. Thus, the project was very rewarding for all involved. Thus, we even published an article about it in the local town magazine (北栄町広報誌「広報北栄」) detailing the interactions for all the townspeople to read about and appreciate.



Reference: https://www.e-hokuei.net/secure/16566/2022_11s.pdf

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the purpose and role of English teaching at the university level will change as students at the elementary and secondary levels improve their basic English skills. This will mean that universities will be able to implement project-based tasks that rely on higher level collaboration skills, as well as teamwork and critical thinking skills. The improved basic level of English ability of these students due to the increased input of language teaching of the basic skills at the younger age levels combined with the increased use and ability students are gaining through using technology will benefit language learning and teaching. We hope that you might be inspired to try such task-based English language projects in your own teaching.

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