

# I Finally Learnt How Interesting Group Work Is!: Student Perceptions of a Video-Based Project for Academic Literacy

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# **I Finally Learnt How Interesting Group Work Is!:**

## **Student Perceptions of a Video-Based Project for Academic Literacy**

Khadijah OMAR

### **Abstract**

Academic Literacy is a new Academic English course at Kyushu University taught to a large number of students over a short period of eight weeks, with long workload hours. A video-based group project was designed to address these three challenges; such an assignment meant that students worked mostly after class, while collaboratively producing a video for the instructor to assess, and presenting the final product in the last lesson. This paper reports on the design of the project as it was implemented in the first semester of AY2025, and discusses the findings from their post-course evaluations and reflections.

### **1. Introduction**

This paper aims to examine how a video-based group project can be designed for large EFL classes, and whether students perceive it as beneficial to their English learning. The following research questions were formulated. First, how was the group project assignment designed? Second, how did the students perceive the group project assignment? And finally, were the students able to improve their English by working on this project?

### **Academic Literacy Course**

The Academic Literacy course was launched in April 2025 as part of the Kyushu University's new Learning English for Academic Purposes (Q-LEAP 4) curriculum. The course is for first-year students; each class comprises between 50 and 60 students, who earn one credit upon completion. The total workload is 45 hours over a period of one quarter, or eight weeks. Academic Literacy is more challenging to manage compared to Interaction and Academic Writing, two other new English courses, both of which have the same amount of workload over a longer period of 15 weeks, with smaller class sizes of 25 to 30

students.

The author was assigned four Academic Literacy classes in the first semester, amounting to over 200 students to grade just for this particular course. To address this issue, a group project was chosen as the main assignment; this would contribute to the expected 3.5 hours of homework, and the end product being a group effort would cut down on the number of final assignments to grade.

The syllabus used Common Sense Education’s freely available Digital Citizenship Curriculum (n.d.). However, time constraints meant that not all the materials could be covered. For example, Unit 4 originally included filter bubble, and Unit 5 originally included hate speech, but this had to be omitted. It should be noted that the topics (Table 1) are from early 2025; sometime during the year the online materials were revised, and the topic names were also updated.

**Table 1**  
*Weekly topics*

| Week   | Topic                                               | Updated Topic Names            |
|--------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Week 1 | Orientation; Unit 1: Digital Footprint and Identity |                                |
| Week 2 | Unit 2: Media Balance and Wellbeing                 | Healthy Habits                 |
| Week 3 | Unit 3: Privacy and Security                        | Privacy and Safety             |
| Week 4 | Unit 4: News and Media Literacy                     | Information and Media Literacy |
| Week 5 | Unit 4: News and Media Literacy                     |                                |
| Week 6 | Unit 5: Cyberbullying and Digital Drama             | Cyberbullying and Online Harms |
| Week 7 | Unit 6: Relationships and Communication             |                                |
| Week 8 | Video screening; post-course questionnaire          |                                |

The students were graded based on the tasks listed in Table 2. The classroom activities were individual, pair, or group work activities based on the textbook materials done during the weekly lessons, while the homework was reading and listening tasks done as after-class assignments. There were no tests or exams. Instead, the project work (individual and group) made up 40% of the final grade. For the project, students worked together on their video every week, reported what they were doing in the individual report, submitted the video in time for the screening in Week 8, and finally did the evaluation and reflection at

the end of the course.

**Table 2**  
*Course assessment*

| Classroom activities | Homework | Project work (individual)                | Video (group)                                     | Total |
|----------------------|----------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------|
|                      |          | Weekly reflection<br>and peer evaluation | Content, language, technical<br>aspect and timing |       |
| 40%                  | 20%      | 20%                                      | 20%                                               | 100%  |

**2. Methodology**  
**Data Collection**

A total of 209 students from four classes took the Academic Literacy course in the first semester of AY2025. At the beginning of the course, all students were informed that their data would be collected for research purposes, and given the option to participate. 208 out of 209 students consented; any data from the one student who declined has been omitted from this paper. At the end of the course, all students were instructed to complete peer evaluation, self-evaluation and reflection questions (Appendix D). 170 students (81.7%) of the 208 students answered the questions; the analysis for this paper is based on their responses. The responses were not anonymous since their answers to the evaluation questions were used to give them points for the project work component of the course assessment.

**Group Project Design**

Several studies have discussed features that result in successful group project outcomes. Salim et al. (2024) surveyed 100 Malaysian university students to investigate their perceptions about group work. The challenges listed in the questionnaire include a lack of communication, initiative, quality work from peers, participation, and unequal distribution of tasks. Tanaka (2022) notes in her study of 200 Japanese university students that a positive group work experience increases motivation, which in turn is a predictor of better course grades. Zainal et al. (2021) assigned a video essay group project to 28 English literature majors at a Malaysian university; they found that the students felt a sense of ac-

complishment after working together to develop the literary content that they had learnt and present it in video form, although the video production and group work aspects were quite challenging.

Morgan (2023) assigned scaffolded writing-based group work to 24 Japanese university students, tracing the students' responses to the task over ten weeks. The themes that emerged from the students' weekly reflections are similar to the ones mentioned in Salim (2024), specifically, "They disliked working in mixed proficiency groups, were dissatisfied with their partners and with the number of people per group (in some cases, groups of three were required) or were dissatisfied with unequal contributions during group work. The group dynamics were the focus, in which group members or partners were the problem." (p. 384). After the first few weeks, however, the students began to enjoy the group activities, especially since the group compositions changed every week, and the end-of-course reports were mostly positive.

In group projects, there might be 'free riders' or 'passengers' who do not do their share of the work. Hall and Buzzwell (2013) described this common problem at an Australian university; 205 students were asked about their experiences with group work, and most reported that they had faced issues with free-riding teammates. To mitigate the possibility of having free riders in this course, several techniques were used.

### Student Preferences

Before the project started, in Week 2, the students were asked to anonymously share what they liked and disliked about group projects. Answers about the former include "many ideas" and "cooperation", while responses to the latter include "takes a long time" and "communication" (the spelling and grammar of all student responses mentioned have been edited for clarity). The responses helped them to reorient themselves towards the project goal; by identifying their preferences and verbalising the challenges of group work from the start, they were better equipped to handle them.

### Group Plan

Next, they were informed about the group project assignment: a 5-minute

video on digital citizenship, the instructions for which can be seen in Appendix A. In addition, they were provided with a list of frequently-asked questions (FAQs) to answer any concerns they might have. They were then divided into groups of three to five people, assigned topics from the digital citizenship syllabus in Table 1, and instructed to prepare a plan for the next six weeks (Appendix B). They were informed that they would be given some time at the end of each class to discuss the project with their group members, but that the bulk of the work had to be done outside of class. This meant that they had to organise their work and ensure that communication and after-class meetings proceeded smoothly. The video had to be submitted before the final lesson in Week 8, when it would be presented to the whole class. This deadline forced them to plan their work in advance to ensure that technical problems would not interfere with their final submission.

### Individual versus Group

One more technique was to separate the students' individual project work from the final video: this was done through individual project reports, peer evaluation and self-evaluation. Being in the same group and producing the same video did not necessarily mean getting the same grade since individual contribution also played a role. Starting from Week 3, at the end of each lesson, the students got together to plan and work on their project. After each session, they were asked to fill in brief individual reports (Appendix C) to check in regarding their plans; this was only marked as done or not done, and not given a score. The purpose of the individual report was to ensure that the students were aware about their weekly plans, and their own role and responsibility. After the video screening in Week 8, they evaluated their team members' contributions to the project, and explained their own contribution. Having the group project be assigned not as a lump sum group grade helped to make it fair for all students, and encouraged them to fully participate in the group work.

### **Summer Quarter Revisions**

Following the spring quarter, a few changes were made for the summer quarter students. First, the video project instructions (Appendix A) were made

clearer following questions from the spring quarter students that were not covered in the FAQs. In spring the theme was digital citizenship, with each group free to pick whichever topic they wanted, but in summer the topics were randomly assigned to each group. Also, in spring the instructions was for a video in any format (examples: interview, short film, news report, commercial, vlog), but in summer they were specifically instructed to include acting, so as to ensure that they did not use just text-heavy slides. Also, at least two group members had to physically appear in the video, instead of just doing voiceovers.

Second, the group plan (Appendix B) that they had to prepare in Week 2 was made easier by giving them a template for the weekly schedule, and adding a section for group rules. Their plan was clearer in table format, and some of the rules they came up with, such as “respect others”, and “English only” seemed helpful. It was also made clear that they could change the plan that they submitted in Week 2, as long as the video was submitted on time before the screening in Week 8.

Third, the students were asked to do a SWOT analysis in Week 4 to ensure that they were on track, as seen in Table 3 below. SWOT, which stands for strength-weakness-opportunity-threat (Patrick et al., 2020) would further help them with their project management and foster accountability. Some of the responses for S-W-O-T were “positive attitude”, “everyone’s busy”, “increase meeting” and “deadline is near our exam”, respectively. Doing the analysis at the halfway point was more useful than having it done at the beginning of the course; after a few weeks of working together, the students were more familiar with their group members’ work styles.

**Table 3**  
*SWOT analysis*

| Your goal is to produce a group video before the deadline. |                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Strengths                                                  | Weaknesses                                     |
| What the members of your group are good at                 | What the members of your group need to improve |
| Opportunities                                              | Threats                                        |
| Opportunities that help your goal                          | External challenges that might block your goal |

Finally, in the spring quarter the students were divided into groups of four,

meaning that there were 13 groups for each of the two classes. However, there was barely enough time to screen 13 videos around five to six minutes long during a 90-minute lesson. In the summer quarter, the students were divided into 12 groups with around five students in each group.

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

The end goal of the group project was for the students to produce a video, and at the end of the course, all the groups managed to upload and present their group video. Following the video screening, the students were asked to write comments; some of these include “It is a very good movie! I think that it would be better if you add music” and “The video is easy to understand. I think your video can be improved by adding subtitles”. After the final lesson, the students were asked to fill in the post-course questionnaire (Appendix D); as mentioned previously, 170 students (81.7%) completed it. They wrote their answers as free responses; these were analysed and grouped under similar themes.

#### **Peer and Self-Evaluation**

The students were asked to evaluate their group members’ contributions and assign each person points out of 5. Most of the students gave their teammates 5 points, indicating that they were satisfied with their level of teamwork, but some did give fewer points. The self-evaluation section was scored based on whether or not the student completed it; all of those who did got 5 points. These peer and self-evaluation points were combined and divided by the number of group members, and then added to their individual project report score to get a score for the individual portion of the project assignment.

#### **Effects of Group Work**

Despite their misgivings at the beginning of the course when they shared what they did not like about doing group projects, all of the students were enthusiastic about their group work experience following the in-class video screening in Week 8.

First, they were asked how they personally contributed to the project. There was some overlap between the roles; many of the students did not handle

just one task. 92 students (54%) were actors, followed by 63 (37%) who were editors, 58 (34%) who wrote the script, 45 (26%) who were involved as the film crew, and 36 (21%) who did the planning.

Second, they were asked about their greatest strengths as a team member, and the group skills they planned to work to improve. As with the first question, some of the students mentioned more than one strength or weakness. Several strengths cropped up frequently: video production skills came in first (23.5%), followed by putting in effort (15.2%), giving ideas (14.7%), leadership (13.5%), planning (12.9%) and acting (12.4%). Their greatest weakness was noted to be collaboration (27.6%) and communication (24.7%), followed by planning (17%), video production skills (14%), giving ideas (13%) and leadership skills (9.4%). A few students also mentioned acting and a negative mindset as something they wanted to work on.

### **Reflection and Main Takeaway**

The students also reflected on what they learnt from the process of producing and screening their group video, as well as watching the other groups' videos in class. Most of the students (47.6%) said that they learnt the value of collaboration from the process of producing their group video; one student commented, "Finally, I could learn how interesting group work is!" Some other things that they learnt were planning (27.6%), communication (20.6%), video production skills (17.6%), sense of accomplishment (14.7%) and digital citizenship content (11.8%). Some students also mentioned language, taking initiative, time management and giving ideas.

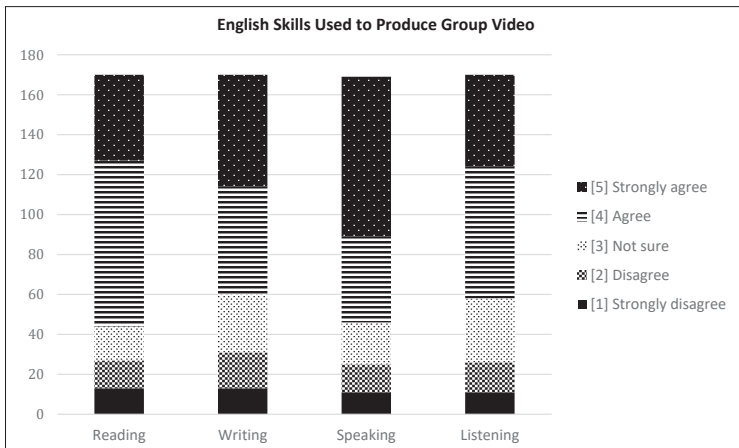
When asked to reflect on the other groups' videos, the students were most impressed by the digital citizenship content (44%). Many of them learnt something new from the videos that had not been covered in their lessons or classroom materials. In addition, they realised how different groups could interpret the topics by presenting them through diverse and creative methods of storytelling (36.5%). They thought that their classmates' work were deeply engaging, and took the audience into account, such as by making the language easily comprehensible, or by adding subtitles, something that is not required in the project instructions. Finally, they saw how their peers were able to make use of the

same instructions, but elevate the end product through polished camerawork and professional-level editing (23.5%).

The next question asked what were the things the students had learnt from group work that they would apply in future group projects. Their main takeaway was that collaboration (41.2%) was of the utmost importance, followed by project management (23.5%) and communication (20.6%). Several of the students referred to report-consult-contact, which appears to have been translated from the Japanese management concept of *hōrensō*, or *hōkoku-renraku-sōdan* (report-contact-consult) (Kitamura, 2021). One student reflected that the lack of this communication strategy in his group's discussion process resulted in a weaker final product. Some of the other points mentioned were giving ideas, video production skills, taking initiative, and having the right mindset.

### Usage of English

The students were asked to rate their perception of whether they could use their English skills when working on this project by selecting options from a five-point Likert scale. As suggested by Koo and Yang (2025), the results are presented using a Likert chart for easier visualisation instead of means-based reporting, which is inaccurate for ordinal numbers.



**Figure 1** *English skills used to produce group video*

From the Likert chart in Figure 1, it can be seen that most of the 170 respondents (25%) agreed and an even larger percentage (47%) strongly agreed that they were able to use their English-speaking skills to produce a group video on digital citizenship. Even though the group discussions were conducted in their L1 to facilitate the generation of ideas, they were still able to use L2 when acting for the videos. Similarly, 49% agreed and 25% strongly agreed that they made use of their reading skill while working on the video, mostly when doing research for their video content and reading the script before their acting performance. They were slightly less certain about the writing and listening skills: 32% agreed and 33% strongly agreed on writing, while 39% agreed and 27% strongly agreed on listening.

While it is very gratifying that the students mostly had positive views of how much they were able to use their English skills, a methodological shortcoming should be noted; the percentage of positive views could have been even higher if not for this. The Likert-based question is on a five-point scale; however, the online response form displayed only the first three options, and students would need to scroll to the right to see the remaining options. To a student in a hurry to get this final reflection over with, they probably did not notice, and merely selected what they could see.

This explains the discrepancy in some students' answers: one example is a student who selected Strongly Disagree for all four English skills, indicating that she was not able to use her English skills for this group project, but yet enthusiastically remarked later, "I was able to improve my English speaking and writ-

| I was able to use my English _____ skill to produce a group video on digital citizenship. |                       |                       |                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                                                                                           | [1] Strongly disagree | [2] Disagree          | [3] Not sure          |
| a. reading                                                                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. writing                                                                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. speaking                                                                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. listening                                                                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**Figure 2** Online Likert-scale question fails to display full set of choices from [1] Strongly disagree to [5] Strongly agree

ing skills by saying many lines and creating sentences for the subtitles in our videos. I also tried to understand the meaning of other groups' videos without relying on the subtitles, so I think my overall English ability has improved." This student was actively involved in her group's project as one of the main actors, which made her all 1-point rating all the more puzzling.

### **Improvement of English**

Finally, the students reflected on whether they were able to improve their English skills by working on the group project. Three most frequently mentioned areas were scriptwriting (37.6%), vocabulary (26%), and acting (22.4%). Scriptwriting makes use of a productive skill, which is why most of the students who played some part in developing their group's script noted their improvement. Preparing the script meant that the students had to do research by reading up about their topic. They could not just rely on the textbook; they had to do their own research to produce a good video. They also had to write the script to make it engaging yet comprehensible, proofread the results for spelling and grammar mistakes before shooting their video, and to also add subtitles after they had filmed their footage.

The students were pleasantly surprised by the number of words and expressions that they learnt during the video production process. They tried hard to make the phrases sound natural, and not just what they learnt from the textbook. They had been given the freedom to choose the content, as long as it corresponded to their group's topic, and this was reflected in their video content. The words were not only the ones related to the theme of digital citizenship; they were also those related to video production, as well as those related to daily conversation, meaning that the students used a wide range of academic and informal language.

Some of the students improved their English because as actors, they paid attention to practising their lines and pronouncing the words clearly. They especially appreciated the fact that they could express themselves in English. Even though there was no 'English-only' rule in the classroom, some of them did try to speak to their teammates in English. As for why there were more students who claimed they used more of their speaking skill compared to writing, this is

possibly because in each group, there were more actors than scriptwriters. Those who were scriptwriters seemed to improve their English more, but most of the students had more opportunity to polish their speaking skills instead.

### **Challenges**

However, it is also noteworthy how some students reported not much improvement. Although constituting a very small percentage of respondents (0.08%, or 13 students), the findings can help fine-tune future courses. They can be broadly categorised into three areas. First, some groups merely wrote the script, and recorded themselves reading it for the video, which meant that they did not improve much. Second, several students noted the drawback of task delegation in group projects. One of them explained that since another group member had been assigned the task of preparing the script, he himself did not participate, ruefully noting that he could have learnt more English if he had been delegated the task. Finally, some of the students probably lost sight of the fact that this is an English class. Because it is project-based learning, they were given free rein to decide on the form of their end product, and had to make the decisions themselves. One of the students took the easy way out by relying on machine translation, ending with their realisation in the post-course reflection that they had not improved because they “relied on the translation machine and did not try to think of English sentences” themselves. While AI was permitted for this project, the instructor had hoped that they would use it more judiciously, as the project was supposed to help them work on their English proficiency. However, the initial project instructions, as shown in Appendix B, was not so clear on this point.

### **4. Conclusion**

The video-based project assigned as part of Academic Literacy was successful in having the students manage their work and submit satisfactory videos by the deadline. The students also perceived the assignment as helpful to improve their English skills. However, since task delegation, the use of L1 in group discussions, AI application, and focus on video production rather than English use seemed to affect the students’ use of English, the goal of this EFL

project should be made clear to future students.

### Acknowledgement

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## Appendix A

### *Instructions for Video Project*

- This is a group project that you will submit at the end of the course.
- All group members are responsible for the final outcome. If any member drops out, the remaining members have to pick up the slack.
- You will produce a video based on the theme “Digital Citizenship”. Each group will be randomly assigned a different topic.
- The video can be any format, as long as there is acting and not just text slides. Some ideas: interview, short film, news report, commercial, vlog etc.
- Use any movie-making software on your computer or phone.
- The language should be in English.
- The length of the video should be between 5-6 minutes ONLY.
- Submit your completed video by the deadline. Due date: before Week 8.
- All submitted assignments must be made available to the instructor until you receive your grade.

## Appendix B

### *Plan for Group Project*

Group No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Members: \_\_\_\_\_

You have THREE goals:

- (a) Main goal: Produce a video as a group
- (b) Secondary goal: Collaborate with your group members to successfully achieve (a)
- (c) Secondary goal: Make the experience smooth and enjoyable for everyone (think about what you like and don’t like)

How can you plan this project so that it fulfills the three goals? Write your group’s plan for the next six weeks.

| Week   | In Class*       | After Class**  |
|--------|-----------------|----------------|
| Week 2 | Group planning  | Group planning |
| Week 3 |                 |                |
| Week 4 |                 |                |
| Week 5 |                 |                |
| Week 6 |                 |                |
| Week 7 |                 |                |
| Week 8 | Video screening | None           |

\* You will have around 15 minutes to work on your group project in class each week

\*\*Plan what to do after class, before the following week's lesson

Our group rules:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### *Weekly Individual Project Report*

#### 1. PLAN

At the beginning of the week, think...

- a. What are your group's plans for this week?
- b. What is your own role in the plan?

#### 2. REPORT

At the end of the week, think...

- a. Were you able to achieve your goals for the week?
- b. Why or why not?

#### REFLECT

How can you improve on your group's plan?

## Appendix D

### *Peer Evaluation*

Evaluate your group members' contributions based on these criteria, and give each of them points out of 5 (5 = excellent; 4 = very good; 3 = good; 2 = acceptable; 1 = poor):

#### Criteria

- Attended group meetings regularly and arrived on time.
- Contributed meaningfully to group discussions.
- Listened to and respected the ideas of others.
- Demonstrated a cooperative and supportive attitude.
- Communicated effectively with teammates.
- Completed group tasks on time.
- Produced quality work.
- Contributed to the success of the project.

### *Self-Evaluation*

1. Explain how you personally contributed to the group project.
1. My greatest strengths as a team member are:
2. The group work skills I plan to work to improve are:
3. What did you learn about working in a group from this project that you will carry into your next group experience?

### *Reflection*

1. I was able to use my English \_\_\_\_\_ skill to produce a group video on digital citizenship.

|              | [1] Strongly disagree | [2] Disagree | [3] Not sure | [4] Agree | [5] Strongly agree |
|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------|
| a. reading   |                       |              |              |           |                    |
| b. writing   |                       |              |              |           |                    |
| c. speaking  |                       |              |              |           |                    |
| d. listening |                       |              |              |           |                    |

2. Reflect on the whole process of producing your group's video, and finally screening it in class. What have you learnt from the experience?
3. Reflect on the videos that the other groups screened in class. What have you learnt from them?
4. Do you think that you were able to improve your English skills by working on this group project? Explain your answer.