# Creating TV Commercials in an EFL Classroom

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In an increasingly interconnected world, English has become the lingua franca of business and science, creating an increasing demand for workers with the ability to communicate in English. In response to this situation, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) current policies require the assessment of interest, motivation, and attitude toward communication by secondary education EFL teachers. Nonetheless, students often sit silently as they listen to lectures in many EFL classrooms. A student-centered course is described in this paper, in which project-based learning and drama were combined to develop the communicative English skills of 1st-year students at a technical school for engineers in Japan. Students were placed in small groups and worked over a 15-week period to create multiple TV commercials, which provided different entry points for diverse learners and enabled group members to take on different roles in the writing and production processes.

昨今、ますますグローバル化された世界では、ビジネスや科学分野で英語でコミュニケーションが取れる働き手に対するデマンドは増え続けている。文部科学省では、中学校及び高校でのEFL教師による英語指導において、学生のコミュニケーションに対する関心やモチベーションを引き出し、授業参加態度等に対する評価が必要だとされているにも関わらず、教室では学生が静かに座り、講義を聞く姿が多く見受けられる。本論では学生中心の授業展開（プロジェクトベースラーニングPBL）について説明する。エンジニア向け工業専門学校1年生のコミュニケーション能力を伸ばすためにこのPBLと演劇要素を組み合わせて展開された。クラスではチームに分かれ、TVコマーシャルを制作することをゴールに約15週間に亘りプロジェクトを進めたが、そのワークを通して多様な学習者に異なるエントリーポイントを与え、更にグループメンバーはライティングや制作工程でそれぞれ異なる役割を全うすることができた。

The goal of English education during the Meiji Period in Japan was to acquire technical knowledge from the West quickly and to translate the information into Japanese for public consumption (Friedman, 2016). The influence of the mind-set of using the grammar-translation method as used during the Meiji period remains evident in EFL classrooms of Japan today (Friedman, 2016; Sasaki, 2008). However, in an increasingly interconnected world, there is a growing demand for workers with communicative English abilities in the landscapes of business and science. In response to this demand, the educational policies of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) require the assessment of interest, motivation, and attitude toward communication; expression; comprehension; and knowledge and understanding about language and culture in EFL secondary education (Sasaki, 2008). At the National Institute of Technology, Okinawa College (Okinawa Kosen), the students major in one of four fields of engineering. Although an emphasis is placed on mathematics- and engineering-specific courses, the important role communicative English will play in the lives of graduating students is not lost.

The goal of Okinawa Kosen is to develop engineers capable of consuming and producing international research and communicating with the international community. All teachers at Okinawa Kosen undergo training to promote active learning strategies in the classroom. Bonwell and Eison (1991) defined active learning as "anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (p. 2). One active learning approach that is widely employed at Okinawa Kosen is project-based learning (PBL), which has been shown to be effective in EFL (see e.g., Aziza, 2017; Gomleksize, 2007; Kovalyova, Soboleva, & Kerimkulov, 2016; Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014; Torres & Rodríguez, 2017). The goals of the project were to motivate the students to communicate by using English, reduce anxiety, provide students at various English proficiency levels with opportunities to actively participate, cultivate creativity, provide speaking and writing opportunities, incorporate the students' interests and culture, and develop teamwork. With the goals in mind, the TV commercial project (TVCP) was

conceived. Creating multiple TV commercials in teams would allow students to express their creativity, interests, and culture in exploring a variety of topics, while encouraging students with different strengths and weaknesses to communicate with their teammates, speak, and write in English. Formative assessment of the students' writing was used throughout the process. Formative assessments "monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback" whereas summative assessments "evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark" (Eberly Center, n.d.).

## Course Design Rationale

PBL is a comprehensive instructional approach to engage students in sustained, cooperative investigation (Bransford & Stein, 1984). The goals are set by the learners in PBL, allowing unexpected discoveries, problem identification and formulation, and interaction with the environment to serve as guides (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989). Students can gain a sense of responsibility by completing projects about their classroom, school, or community through collaborating, helping, and learning from their classmates (Kolodner et al., 2003; Markham, 2011). Torres and Rodríguez (2017) found that "the incorporation of PBL in EFL learning incited learners to enhance their communicative competence with a major emphasis on the speaking skill" (p. 69). In a study of the use of PBL, Aziza (2017) concluded, "with PBL implementation, students' monotone and dull school life become[s] more colorful and attractive and PBL incentivizes and motivates students" (p. 77). Using a mixed methods design in their study of the use of PBL in an EFL class for engineering students, Kovalyova et al. (2016) found that "the implementation of PBL in teaching EFL can really enhance students' self-confidence in using English as an important means of communication in various spheres of engineering activity" (p. 156). Despite difficulties encountered working on the project, 58% of the students suggested further implementation of the project and 92% of the students "considered the project work as productive for the development of their future research careers" (Kovalyova et al., 2016, p. 156). Incorporating PBL into an EFL course allows students opportunities to create something connected to their interests and experiences while developing communicative English skills to aid their future careers.

Speeches and presentations are commonly used to display what the students have learned as the culmination of a project. However, speeches and presentations can limit the range of emotions and actions that can be put into words. Using drama in EFL classrooms enables students to connect their words to actions and infuse meanings with emotions. Citing an edited volume by Cope and Kalantzis, Murray, Salas, and Thoghdha

(2015) wrote, "Applied theatre creates opportunities for expressive and receptive communication in audio, gestural, spatial, linguistic, and visual modes working together in a complementary way" (p. 10). The different modes of learning and interacting with material make drama accessible to diverse learners from multiple entry points (Murray et al., 2015). Gorjian, Moosavinia, and Jabripour (2010) concluded in their study of an EFL drama class that when the content was presented through dramatization, "in the form of language in action," the learners' motivation was increased (p. 10). Therefore, it was decided to combine PBL with drama-based activities.

Several considerations motivated the choice and design of the project for the English Communication (ECM) course. Activities should be designed to improve the students' oral and written proficiency; include the students' cultures, interests, and experiences; and access the students' creativity. As well, measures should be taken to create a safe, positive, and encouraging learning environment. It was decided that students would work in small groups to create a series of TV commercials. This would combine PBL and drama, enabling students to develop their communicative English skills through producing short videos on a variety of topics while providing different entry points for diverse learners and enabling group members to take on different roles in the writing and production processes of different TV commercials.

## The Course: Creating TV Commercials
### Students

At Okinawa Kosen, 1st-year students (average age of 15 years) take the ECM course as one of three EFL courses. The ECM course consists of fifteen 90-minute classes over one semester. There were approximately 42 students per class, 77% male and 23% female. Students in the 1st-year classes had various levels of listening and reading proficiency, with scores on TOEIC Bridge™ ranging from 78 to 180 and an average score of 109. Although some students had experienced living abroad in English-speaking countries, most students reported rarely or never speaking English. In addition, one fairly unique aspect of student life at Okinawa Kosen considered in the course design is that all 1st-year students are required to live in the school dormitories, allowing the students more time for meeting outside of class time.

### Course Concept

First-year students in the ECM course worked on oral communication activities during the first 45 minutes of each class and their projects during the second 45 minutes. The goals of

the TVCP were to provide speaking and writing opportunities connected to the students' interests and experiences and make the students active participants in the learning process. The students were placed in teams, given instructions, and guided through the various stages to create a variety of TV commercials. Research suggests that students learn better and reach higher levels of achievement through group work (Gomleksize, 2007; Hendry et al., 2005; Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014). To promote student accountability and ownership of the project, teams were provided with guidelines via a rubric, a description of the suggested process, and a final deadline. However, teams were ultimately responsible for managing their time, the production process, and work allocation to promote learner autonomy. To take ownership of the language to be learned, the learners, rather than the instructor, textbook, or syllabus, should be in control of learning (Benson, 2001). Keys to learner autonomy are "insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others" (Dafei, 2007, p. 6).

## Course Procedure

On the first day of the course, each class was divided into six teams of six or seven members. The procedure of the TVCP was outlined for the students as follows:

- Create a production schedule,
- Brainstorm commercials concepts,
- Outline concepts,
- Create storyboards and scripts,
- Shoot videos,
- Edit videos, and
- Make video presentations.

Teams were given a Job Duties Form (Appendix A) and a TVCP Rubric (Appendix B). The purpose of the Job Duties Form was to track the distribution of work amongst each team's members. The TVCP Rubric provided means for the teams to self-assess throughout the process and for assessment by the teacher. Then the students watched video clips of international TV commercials and discussed which commercials they liked the best and why with their teams. Finally, the teams reviewed and discussed the steps in the procedure, the Job Duties Form, and the TVCP Rubric, while the teacher answered questions and monitored discussions. The students were encouraged to ask questions to their teacher and other teams.

## TVCP Rubric

The rubric was first given to the teams only in English. The teams discussed the rubric with their teammates before the criteria were explained. The students were then given more time to discuss the rubric and ask questions and were encouraged to engage with other teams, use their dictionaries, and access the Internet. The rubric was then provided in Japanese and the teams were asked to check their comprehension. This process was used to introduce the students to the challenge of seeking information and being proactive in solving problems.

The five criteria described in the rubric were (a) number of scripts and storyboards, (b) quality of scripts and storyboards, (c) the variety of the commercials produced, (d) distribution of work, and (e) peer ranking. Each category was scored on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest score for each criterion. Each team was asked to make at least four videos with the following themes: one product; one movie or TV show; one tourist spot; and one restaurant, food, or drink. Students were encouraged to self-assess throughout the process. Teams could submit their scripts as many times as necessary prior to the final day of class. The scripts and storyboards were not scored until the students were satisfied with the quality. The level of satisfaction with the quality of the scripts and storyboards varied amongst teams and individual students. Assessment of the quality of the scripts per the rubric was decided by consensus of the teacher and the students prior to the students beginning the video process. The final video presentations were voted on, ranked, and scored by the students from the other groups. The distribution of work was an important consideration. To receive a score of 10 for this criterion, all group members had to write a script, participate as a lead speaking role in at least one commercial, contribute ideas, and help in other aspects of the production process (Appendix B).

## Job Duties Form

To monitor the progress of each team, keep track of the completed scripts and storyboards, and encourage the members of each team to participate in all aspects of the process, each team was given the Job Duties Form (Appendix A). The teacher also had a corresponding Job Duties Form for each team. As the teams completed scripts and assigned job duties, they updated both copies of the forms. The Job Duties Form helped the students to monitor and manage their progress. Teams could set clear expectations for their members. The teacher's copy provided an effective record-keeping tool for scoring purposes. However, transferring information from the student copy to the teacher's copy was time-consuming. In the future, a digital copy on the school's server or using online services for creating forms may be more efficient.

## Production Schedule

The students at Okinawa Kosen are encouraged to be proactive in their own education. Therefore, only the final deadline in week 15, the day of team presentations, was provided for the students. For the TVCP, the teams were encouraged to create their own production schedules and to use their time efficiently. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine whether student-created production schedules were beneficial to the process as no teams created a production schedule until the final month of the course.

Providing more stringent guidelines may be more effective in future courses, as a schedule of deadlines or benchmarks may elicit a more efficient use of the students' time. An activity in which students are given a calendar and required to decide on the dates of various deadlines as a team or class and then given points for each deadline met could also be an effective strategy.

## Brainstorming

After the course explanation on the first day of class, the teams created mind maps with four subcategories as per the minimum requirements of the rubric: products; movies and TV shows; tourist spot; and restaurants, food, and drinks. Students were encouraged to search the Internet for ideas and examples of commercials, talk with other teams, and share their mind maps. During what Krashen and Terrell (1983) described as the pre-production and early production stages, students who did not have the ability to express complex ideas in English were permitted to speak Japanese to share their ideas with their group, enabling greater participation from all group members. Nation (2003) found that EFL "learners who did the preparatory L1 discussion in groups did much better on the L2 written task than other learners who did preparatory L2 discussion even though that discussion was in the same language as the subsequent written task" (p. 3).

Many ideas and examples were shared, and the teams were often immersed in discussions about ideas and production concepts. The brainstorming and research portion of the project took longer than anticipated. For many students, creating mind maps and brainstorming were concepts they were familiar with but had never actively participated in. Many students were reluctant to share their ideas in the first weeks of the course and the teams struggled to get started. As the weeks passed, teams often discussed concepts but did not record their ideas. Thus, time was wasted trying to recall their earlier discussions. For most teams, the brainstorming process took more than 6 weeks to complete.

In the future, setting a target number of ideas each day and deadlines may help to expedite the brainstorming process. Working with each team to provide examples and elicit ideas at the beginning of the process may also produce more efficient results. It might also be beneficial to incorporate free, online applications and software for brainstorming in this part of the process.

## Outlines

During the initial explanation of the project, students were shown a simple outline of a commercial that included three points: beginning, middle, and end. An example of how to expand each point from the simple outline to a detailed outline was provided to students and discussed. This outline example was shown periodically throughout the course. However, only a few teams created outlines due to a lack of time resulting from the time spent researching and brainstorming. Many students were unaware of how to create outlines for creative writing. In the future, setting deadlines and goals, creating outline templates with more detail, and including sentence stems in an outline template may yield better results.

## Scripts and Storyboards

The teams were asked to add notes about actions, emotions, camera angles, and props or costumes into their scripts and storyboards along with the dialogue and illustrations. When self-assessing, the teams were asked to consider, "Could a classmate read your team's script and create a storyboard similar to your team's storyboard? Could a classmate look at your team's storyboard and write a script similar to your team's script?" Scripts and storyboards came in a variety of formats and levels of detail. Time permitting, students were given chances to edit and resubmit their scripts and storyboards until they were satisfied with the product. The levels of student satisfaction were evident upon submission of their scripts and storyboards. Consensus on their scores was reached without conflict. Creating templates for scripts and storyboards along with examples may yield higher qualities of production in future courses. Time constraints also played an important factor in the quality and amount of detail in the scripts and storyboards submitted. Groups who spent 2 to 3 weeks editing and resubmitted their scripts multiple times for feedback produced higher quality scripts.

## Shooting and Editing

Most teams shot their videos using smartphones, but a few teams used regular cameras. Students found editing software online or used applications on their phones. Several teams used editing techniques to create special effects. Other videos included back-

ground music, voiceovers, text, and subtitles. Because all the 1st-year students live in the school dormitories, most commercials were shot on the school campus. Although students were given the option to shoot and edit videos during class time, most groups met after school and on weekends to shoot and edit their videos. There were no reported problems during this part of the process. In the future, access to a green screen and lighting could provide students with the opportunity to add different elements to their commercials.

## Presentations

Videos were shown on the final day of class. By week 15, the students had already been assessed throughout the process of creating commercials. The final day of class was a celebration of the teams' efforts. While some teams shared their commercials with their classmates prior to the presentation, other teams were very secretive and excited to reveal their creations on the final day. The students were excited and showed appreciation for the other teams. The teams produced an average of five commercials. No team produced less than four commercials while one ambitious team produced 10 commercials. The presentations were ranked by their peers via ballots. Students were not allowed to vote for their own team.

## Discussion

The goals of the project were to motivate the students to communicate using English, reduce anxiety, provide opportunities for students with varying English proficiency levels to actively participate, cultivate creativity, provide speaking and writing opportunities, incorporate the students' interests and culture, and develop teamwork. Throughout the project, students collaborated, solved problems, and were empowered to make decisions. PBL is "designed to engage students and empower them with responsibility for their own education in ways unheard of in traditional classrooms" (Solomon, 2003, p. 1). The TVCP provided students who feel anxious about public speaking in English a low-pressure format for presentations by allowing students the chance to correct their mistakes through multiple takes and video editing. All students spoke and acted in at least one commercial. The learning outcomes were similar to those reported by Cunningham (2013) in a case study of a TV advertising project in an EFL class: "Learners were required to express themselves verbally when working in groups to brainstorm, write and revise their scripts, negotiate messages and slogans, organize settings and props, and integrate claims and techniques from the advertising media" (p. 114). The group scores ranged from 64% to 86%. Formative assessment allowed the students to make mistakes in a

low-stakes setting and focus on communicating their ideas through English rather than be concerned about speaking perfectly. The spectrum of storyboards, scripts, and videos produced provided insight into the students' lives. The criterion with the lowest average score was the "number of scripts and storyboards." The criteria with the highest average scores were the "quality of scripts and storyboards" and "distribution of work." Working in groups allowed students to act as teachers and provided support for struggling English learners. Several students made comments outside of the classroom such as: "I don't like English, but I like your class" and "I'm not good at English, but now I want to study English."

Possible improvements to the TVCP should be explored. Providing templates or requiring teams to create a production schedule may help to improve the quality of the projects. However, the increased structure could reduce creative problem-solving and leadership opportunities. Future research could also include measuring changes in students' motivation, sense of satisfaction in their work, and effects on anxiety levels. Creating pre- and postproject questionnaires will enable greater insight into the effect the TVCP has on students' motivation and anxiety communicating in English.

## Conclusion

Prior to taking the ECM course, many students at Okinawa Kosen reported having few opportunities to speak English outside of reciting texts from their textbooks. Creating TV commercials in a classroom project not only provided an authentic context for the students to communicate in English, but the project also empowered students to express their creativity, culture, knowledge, and interests using English.

## Bio Data

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## Appendix A
### *Job Duties*

| Team: | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Used | Commercial Title/Theme | Lead Speaking Role | Script Writer | * Script | * Story-Board | Job Duties |
| | | | | | | Concept:  Director: <br> Story-board:  Editing: <br> Video:  Costumes/Props: <br> Other:  Actors: |

## Appendix B
### TV Commercial Rubric

| | # of Scripts and Storyboards | Quality of Scripts and Story-boards | Variety of Commercials | Distribution of Work | Peer Ranking |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **10 pts.** | 12+ Scripts and Story-boards | Very skillful use of language; very descriptive & detailed. All are creative, interesting, & original. | Produce 8 types<br>1 product; 1 movie or TV show; 1 tourist spot; 1 restaurant or food; + 4 others | + Each member was the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ Each member wrote a script.<br>+ Each member contributed concepts for CMs.<br>+ Even distribution of other job duties. | #1 |
| **9 pts.** | 11~10 Scripts and Story-boards | Skillful use of language; descriptive & detailed. Almost all are creative, interesting, and original. | Produce 7 types<br>1 product; 1 movie or TV show; 1 tourist spot; 1 restaurant or food; + 3 others | + Each member was the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ Most members wrote a script.<br>+ Most members contributed concepts for CMs.<br>+ Even distribution of other job duties. | #2 |
| **8 pts.** | 9~8 Scripts and Story-boards | Good use of language; somewhat descriptive & detailed. Most are creative, interesting, and original. | Produce 6 types<br>1 product; 1 movie or TV show; 1 tourist spot; 1 restaurant or food; + 2 others | + Each member was the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ A few members wrote scripts.<br>+ A few members contributed concepts for CMs.<br>+ Even distribution of other job duties. | #3 |
| **7 pts.** | 7 Scripts and Story-boards | Basic use of language, detail, & description. Some are creative, interesting, & original. | Produce 5 types<br>1 product, 1 movie or TV show, 1 tourist spot, 1 restaurant or food, + 1 other | + Each member was the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ Job duties distributed evenly. | #4 |
| **6 pts.** | 6 Scripts and Story-boards | Simple use of language; limited detail & description. Some are creative, interesting, & original. | Produce 4 types<br>1 product; 1 movie or TV show; 1 tourist spot; 1 restaurant or food. | + Each member was the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over. | #5 and #6 |
| **5 pts.** | 5 Scripts and Story-boards | Simple use of language; lack of detail & description. Some are creative, interesting, & original. | Produce 3 types | + Most members were the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ Most members contributed to job duties. | - |
| **4 pts.** | 4 Scripts and Story-boards | Simple use of language; lack of detail & description. A few are creative, interesting, & original. | Produce 2 types | + A few members were the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ Most members contributed to job duties. | - |

Carman: *Creating TV Commercials in an EFL Classroom*

| | # of Scripts and Storyboards | Quality of Scripts and Story-boards | Variety of Commercials | Distribution of Work | Peer Ranking |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3 pts.** | 3 Scripts and Story-boards | Simple use of language; lack of detail & description. 1 or 2 are creative, interesting, & original. | Produce 1 type | + A few members were the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ A few members contributed to job duties.<br>+ An inactive member. | - |
| **2 pts.** | 2 Scripts and Story-boards | Simple use of language; lack of detail & description. Lack of variety. | - | + A few members were the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ A few members contributed to job duties.<br>+ A couple inactive members. | - |
| **1 pt.** | 1 Script and Story-board | - | - | + A few members were the lead actor, narrator, &/or voice over.<br>+ A few members contributed to job duties.<br>+ Several inactive members. | - |