# Researching Using YouTube as a Method for Required English Assignments

Zach M. Strickland
*Osaka C-NET*
William J. Haynes
*Osaka C-NET*
Martin C. Wick
*Osaka C-NET*

**Reference Data**

Strickland, Z. M., Haynes W. J., Wick, M. C. (2021). Researching using YouTube as a method for required English assignments. In P. Clements, R. Derrah, & P. Ferguson (Eds.), *Communities of teachers & learners*. JALT. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2020-47

This paper is a quantitative research-based study of home learning using YouTube. Because of the coronavirus situation in 2020, students were not able to attend school. In "The Plan" section we explain that the authors of this paper made 36 English lesson videos with the Osaka City Board of Education and uploaded them to YouTube for educational purposes. In "The Videos" we discuss the video production details. In the "Dissemination" we reveal that there were 230,000 total views of these videos targeted to 108,073 students. We also show student viewing habits. In the "Analysis" we examine the relationship between video technology and modern education. Our conclusion is that this method is effective initially because the number of views was very high. However, over time, there was a sharp drop in the number of views and this method became much less effective.

本稿はYouTubeを利用した家庭学習の定量的測定に基づく研究ノートである。現代の動画技術と教育の関係性を検証する。2020年の新型コロナウイルスの影響により生徒は登校することができなくなった。本稿の著者は大阪市教育委員会と共同し、36本の英語レッスン動画を作りYouTubeにアップロードした。動画の制作方法については後述する。10万8,073人の生徒がこのビデオを23万回以上視聴したことが明らかになった。視聴傾向として、投稿初期は視聴回数が多く、この方法の有効性が認められた。しかし時間が経つにつれ視聴回数が激減し、この方法の効果が大幅に低下した。

Due to the emergency surrounding Covid-19, teachers around the world were faced with the challenges of teaching students who were no longer able to come to school. Some teachers have found that with YouTube they were able to provide supplementary videos that were accessible to students but questioned the effectiveness of the venue. This study is a quantitative research-based discussion and analysis of the efficacy of assigning video-based lessons to students. Our work attempts to understand if the students who were expected to watch did. We also examine if they continued to watch later assignments beyond the first video. We collected the data for our research using the Osaka City Board of Education's official YouTube Creator Channel Analytics. This data was compiled from over 230,000 YouTube video views.

The teachers involved, referred to as C-NETs, are assistant language teachers hired by the Osaka City Board of Education. Our duties are broad and include the basics from assisting teachers with lesson planning and conducting lessons to more focused tasks such as preparing for speech contests, teaching students to prepare for the EIKEN exam, and organizing English summer camps. Despite what our contracts limit us to, we are often allowed to lead in class teaching and use our own materials and lesson plans with varying levels of success. The answers you get about a C-NET's experience in and out of the classroom will vary widely from teacher to teacher. Throughout this paper, we hope to make sense of the landscape at our schools during the beginnings of the pandemic. The authors discuss the video production plan, the videos made, how they were distributed, issues that arose, and analysis of the data.

## The Plan

After the decision was made by the Osaka City Board of Education to temporarily close schools down because of the 2020 pandemic, the authors of this paper were asked to come in for an emergency meeting. A select number of C-NETs, around two dozen, were tasked with making supplemental English videos that the students could watch at home on YouTube.

There were 5 specific goals for this project: a) produce English language, educational videos that teach the same content that the students would be learning from their textbooks if they had been in school as usual; b) make sure that content becomes easily accessible to the majority of the students within the Osaka municipal schools; c) make sure the students know about that content and how to find it; d) have some interactive elements so students are encouraged and have the opportunity to speak out and use the target language; and e) produce videos that are enjoyable to watch so that students are encouraged to watch each successive video in the series.

In addition to producing useful, educational content for our students we also decided this would be a good chance to analyze their viewing habits afterward. YouTube has been used before as a method of delivering educational content as Japan struggled to come to terms with online learning (Kittaka, 2020). We decided as a new generation of educators, this was a good opportunity to examine past studies in addition to creating content that we believed students would watch at home. Finally, we could analyze the resulting data.

## The Videos

The board of education initially asked us, the Osaka C-NETs (City Native English Teachers) to produce videos. The C-NET program is made up of around 140 native English speakers with varying fields of studies who have at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited university and come from different countries around the world. They work together with the Japanese staff and teachers at public schools to conduct English lessons. We were asked to produce 36 videos in three waves. These videos were for elementary school 4th, 5th, and 6th grade as well as junior high school 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade. There were two videos for each grade released per wave. The waves were separated by one week each. Videos were chosen as the delivery method as they are an effective medium for getting across content in all subjects (Rammal, 2011; York, 2011). Also, YouTube is the easiest way for students to access content quickly and effectively (Hart, 2020; Watkins & Wilkins, 2011; York, 2011).

During the preparation stages of this project, all the members of the C-NET program were given the option of attending work at the Osaka City Education Center to work on the project or remain at their schools to assist in other school related work. Due to the restrictions in usage of the building and recording spaces, the number of C-NETs who opted to assist on the project had to be limited. 45 C-NETs were selected as actors, 15 were video editors and production assistants. There was a single C-NET who created close to 200 new pieces of art that were utilized as in-video vocabulary cards, animated props, and backgrounds. One C-NET also composed and recorded the opening and closing theme song. The rest of the participating C-NETs developed scripts and worksheets that would be utilized with the videos. Later, because the online videos were not accessible to all the students in Osaka, the worksheets developed were scrapped and never used. Of the dozens of submitted scripts, only the best scripts were selected that met the goals of this project.

The Osaka Education Center has a studio space that was utilized for shooting. The lighting, green screens, and other various production equipment were provided by the city. Many C-NETs have background experience with this kind of production either for work or hobby and the cameras, computers, and software were mostly provided by C-NETs whose personal equipment tended to be more modern and higher end.

Each of the English videos began with an introduction sequence resembling a television show intro featuring the C-NETs and a theme song, followed by a dramatic scene performed by native speakers and then an interactive lesson and a closing song. A green screen, animated backgrounds and objects, and occasionally other special effects were used to make the lessons dynamic and memorable. The intention was to make the dramatic scenes interesting and every aspect of the video colorful and entertaining so that the lesson would be enjoyable, and students would look forward to watching the next videos in the series. In an example of one of these dramatic scenes, a C-NET is at a supermarket, he picks up an item and declares "This is honey." Another C-NET walks in and says, "No, that is shampoo." The C-NET continues to mistake several more items around the grocery store. Fun scenes like this were used in order to disable the viewer's affective filter as much as possible (USC, 2020). A student's affective filter is a way to describe a student's collective feelings and emotions that affect how they learn a language. The best way to understand this is to ask yourself if a junior high school student would enjoy a lesson on business English or casual English better and how the respective material would be engaging for them while also fulfilling the content of the course goals. Disabling the affective filter facilitates a student's engagement and language acquisition.

Initially, we were asked to produce short videos that could easily and effectively be consumed by the students, so tightly edited three-to-five-minute videos were created. The mathematics department, which was also making videos, was producing 10-15-minute lecture style videos as opposed to our dramatic style. With the length of these videos being longer, the board of education asked that the CNET's created videos also be longer in duration of content. It was decided to repeat the content as well as add timed spacing for students to have call and response time so that each of the videos would teach through repetition and the students would end up watching the same content two or three times if they watched the video through to completion.

## Dissemination

The Japanese school year begins at the beginning of April, but this year, 2020, students were told to remain home because of the COVID-19 situation.

On April 13, the board of education sent an email to all its municipal elementary and junior high schools telling them that math and English educational videos were coming soon and instructing them to prepare to notify students and parents about these videos and have information available on the school homepages. On April 19, another message was sent to the schools. This message to the schools said: Tomorrow, April 20, the first wave of videos will be made available on YouTube. There will be two English and two math videos. School staff must send an email out tomorrow to all the students' parents or guardians asking them to watch the videos and stating schools must make links available from the school homepage. On April 20, the first wave of videos was released. On April 27th the second wave of 12 more English and 12 more math videos was released. Another message was sent to the schools with the same instructions as wave 1 about notifying students and parents or guardians. On May 11, the third wave of 12 more English and 12 more math videos were released. Another message was sent to the schools with the same instructions as waves 1 and 2 about notifying students and parents. On the same day, a separate email was sent to the schools informing them that the previously produced videos and future videos would also air on TV Osaka Channel 73. It instructed the schools to tell students to look at the included schedule for their grade's videos and watch on TV, especially students who were unable to watch the online videos. The viewer data in this paper was collected after June 20, a month past the last viewing assignment.

## Issues

Not all students have access to the internet at home. Only 93.2% of Japanese adolescents, aged 10-17, say they use the internet (Government Statistics Cabinet Office 2019). Because of these accessibility limits, the viewing assignments were strongly suggested but not mandatory. Through the personal experiences of the writers, both as students and as teachers, suggested assignments are usually skipped due to many factors that might affect the students' motivation. It is also important to note that secondary school, known as a high school in the U.S., is not mandatory in Japan. By the second year of junior high, many students have already decided if they will continue to secondary education or not, leading to their present attitudes towards studying. Some will continue to be studious learners while others, already knowing that their post junior high plans are decided, will be much less serious in approaching their studies. These attitudes almost certainly affected the level of engagement of the students with this project from the release of the first videos up to the release of the final ones. This can be seen in the chart below titled "Table 1: The Viewing Data" below.

The videos were placed on YouTube as "unlisted." These videos cannot be found with a YouTube search and can only be accessed by someone with a link, so it is assumed that most of the views are from within the target student audience. There is no login information required to watch the unlisted videos, so we do not know exactly who watched the videos or if they were watched together with classmates or family members. We are unable to distinguish student views from the views of teachers and other professionals involved in the video production process. We have assumed that most of the views were students but are not able to specifically say exactly who or how many. One view does not equal one view from one student. More details can be seen in Table 1.

Three of the videos, after release, were deemed too controversial and were re-shot and replaced. As some students had watched the original videos but not the replacement ones, the number of views on those three videos is slightly lower than the number of students who watched an assigned video. Since this is only the case in 3 of the 36 videos, it can still be assumed that the viewing habits overall are accurate.

The most extreme example of this was a video that had someone getting bonked on the head by a falling cartoon baseball. These three videos were up for three days but were taken offline and replaced a few days later with new dramatic, less controversial scenes.

**Table 1**
*The Viewing Data (English Department)*

| English Videos | Number of Students | Video 1 | Video 2 | Video 3 | Video 4 | Video 5 | Video 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4th Grade Elementary | 18,943 | 12,748 | 8,929 | 7,867 | 7,583 | 1,869 | 515 |
| 5th Grade Elementary | 19,194 | 15,238 | 11,033 | 6,369 | 2,661 | 2,171 | 610 |
| 6th Grade Elementary | 19,255 | 19,406 | 13,368 | 7,738 | 6,778 | 441 | 433 |
| 1st Grade Junior High | 17,143 | 18,768 | 12,055 | 9,607 | 7,179 | 1,729 | 572 |
| 2nd Grade Junior High | 16,427 | 11,805 | 7,543 | 4,935 | 3,767 | 1,062 | 303 |
| 3rd Grade Junior High | 17,111 | 10,961 | 6,561 | 3,779 | 2,902 | 701 | 202 |
| Totals | 108,073 | 88,926 | 59,489 | 40,295 | 30,870 | 7,973 | 2,635 |

There were 108,073 students in the target audience at Osaka's municipal public schools. They were all asked to watch the videos. The first videos in the first wave had a total of 88,926 views. These first videos had the highest viewership overall.

In Wave one, there were two videos available for each grade. There was a sharp drop off in the number of views between video one and video two. On average, the number of views by all grades dropped by 33.11%. A third of the viewers did not watch the second video despite it being immediately available. This drop is similar to other research of similar situations where YouTube is used in the classroom (Roodt & Peier, 2013). The drops continued. On average, the viewership of the first video from wave one compared to the first video in wave two, a week later saw a drop of 54.69%. It is clear that the students were not able to maintain interest in watching these videos over time.

Wave three continued the trend of decreasing views. On average, the viewership of the first video from wave one compared to the first video in wave three had a 90.7% drop and then the final video of that third wave saw a drop of 97.04% compared to the earliest views.

During the first three waves of videos, the math department also produced math videos at the same time and rate as ours.

Since the math videos were available at the same time and rate as the English videos, we decided to include their data for comparison purposes. Table 2 shows the math data.

**Table 2**
*The Viewing Data (Math Department)*

| Math Videos | Number of Students | Video 1 | Video 2 | Video 3 | Video 4 | Video 5 | Video 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4th Grade Elementary | 18,943 | 40,725 | 22,400 | 14,912 | 10,244 | 1,307 | 1,181 |
| 5th Grade Elementary | 19,194 | 40,238 | 9,690 | 13,927 | 10,391 | 2,264 | 1,104 |
| 6th Grade Elementary | 19,255 | 18,180 | 10,221 | 8,027 | 5,444 | 2,116 | 995 |
| 1st Grade Junior High | 17,143 | 38,044 | 21,167 | 18,688 | 10,709 | 2,093 | 1,454 |
| 2nd Grade Junior High | 16,427 | 22,313 | 11,887 | 9,661 | 4,874 | 1,142 | 793 |
| 3rd Grade Junior High | 17,111 | 18,304 | 7,420 | 5,829 | 4,066 | 910 | 680 |
| Totals | 108,073 | 177,804 | 82,785 | 71,044 | 45,728 | 9,832 | 6,207 |

The math videos had views much higher than the English videos. Fourth and fifth grade and junior high 1st grade had early views that were more than double the number of target students. The first video views were unusually high, but even apart from those early spikes the other math videos had much higher views than the English videos. The drop in viewership was pretty similar across both subjects. After these first three waves, the board of education produced a few more videos for science, Japanese, and social studies, and they produced more English videos using members of the BOE English department instead of C-NETs. Different grades had different subjects and different numbers of released videos, and the new English videos were very different in structure

and tone, so for clarity and consistency in this research project, we decided to only focus on the data from the first three waves.

## Analysis

The results mirror current trends in using YouTube in the classroom. Like research done in Bangladesh, YouTube videos can provide a positive means for students to receive comprehensible input from native speakers (Hasan, Ibrahim, Mustapha, Islam, & Alm, 2018). However, YouTube has many disadvantages. Students are already using YouTube to watch their favorite content creators or using their devices to play games. This means that students have lots of opportunities to go off-task or become distracted by something else on their devices (Jalaluddin, 2016). With these issues, it's important to have stricter lesson planning management or ways to make viewing the videos mandatory in a more structured lesson (Ladagidze, 2011). Some ideas we thought could be helpful would be to have worksheets that go along with the videos to check comprehension and viewership as well as materials from the videos for use in a post-break exam. Combining these ideas with more interactive elements would allow the teachers to fully utilize Web 2.0 to help the students learn autonomously so that they are learning both in and out of the classroom (McDougal, 2013). Towards the end of the stay-at-home period, students were invited to come back to the school in small, staggered groups to pick up textbooks and to view other educational videos which may have sent a message that the videos in Wave 3 were not as important to view.

The very high viewership of the math videos compared to the English videos could be attributed to the fact that all the videos were listed on the same website and the math videos were listed first in ascending grade order. Viewers were more likely to start watching videos at the top of the list and possibly lost interest over time as they proceeded down the list. This is a factor that could be controlled and analyzed in possible future studies.

If presented with another opportunity to reproduce this kind of project, there are many other possibilities for further study as well. The English videos had looped content to meet the time requirements set by the Board of Education, but shorter, edited videos could be a factor in whether students continue to watch further videos. These factors could be altered and tested. The format of the math lecture and dramatic English videos could be swapped to see if viewing habits change. Data could also be collected and shared from the students as well as teachers to help determine which of the videos were found to be the most useful and easy for students to use and comprehend.

## Conclusion

Based on the high numbers of views compared to the number of students in the target population in the city of Osaka and who had access to view the videos, it has been concluded that assigning video lessons to elementary and junior high school students can be an effective way to get students to watch educational content, initially, even without making the views mandatory or checking whether the students watched, or testing the content later. However, there was a drastic drop in views that got worse over time.

The authors believe that testing or checking that the students watched the videos by making them mandatory or more integrated with the original lesson plans would keep the number of views consistently higher and would be a good subject for further research. Ideas for further research could be to implement lessons from the video into tests or develop worksheets that go along with the video and see how effective those are.

## Bio Data

**Zach M. Strickland** came to Japan 16 years ago and has taught all ages and education levels from infants to seniors. He was a member of the Pirates of the Dotombori bilingual, improv comedy group for 10 of those years and performed across Japan and Asia while also teaching performance workshops. He lives with his wife and daughters in Osaka. <zachzachland@gmail.com>

**William J. Haynes** moved to Japan after finishing his degree in Computer Engineering. He has worked around Osaka and in all grades but primarily focusing on high school education. He has practiced Kendo for several years and participates in events around Osaka. He lives with his wife and children in Sakai. <haynes.william.johnathan@gmail.com>

**Martin C. Wick** has wanted to be an English teacher in Japan since first visiting Japan when he was 17. He is enjoying living the dream with his wife, her parents, and their cat in Takatsuki city. His passions and hobbies include Korean pop music, heavy metal, retro video games, professional wrestling, and not dying. He recently graduated with a Master of Education. <mwick@hawaii.edu>

## References

Government Statistics Cabinet Office. (2019). Survey of youth internet usage environment. Retrieved from http://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000635133.pdf

Hasan, M. Md, Ibrahim, F., Mustapha, S. M., Islam, M. Md, & Alm Younus, A. Md. (2018). The use of YouTube videos in learning English language skills at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. *Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur Research Journal, 6*(1), 27-36.

Jalaluddin, M. (2016). Using YouTube to enhance speaking skills in ESL classroom. *English for Specific Purposes World, 17*(50), 1-3.

Hart, J. (2020). Top tools for learning 2020: Results of the 14th annual survey published 1 September 2020. (2021, May 31st). Top 200 tools for learning. Retrieved from https://www.toptools4learning.com/

Kittaka, G. L. (2020, April 20). Coronavirus crisis offers chance to update Japanese schools. *The Japan Times.* Retrieved from https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2020/04/20/issues/coronavirus-crisis-japanese-schools-online/

Ladagidze, L. (2011). YouTube in the classroom – pros and cons. *International Periodical Scientific Journal ™intellecti," 2*(40), 60.

McDougal, J. S. (2013). The use of new technologies among in-service Colombian ELT teachers. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal, 15*(2), 247-264.

Rammal, S. M. (2005, April 12-13). Using video in the EFL classroom [Conference presentation]. CDELT 25th Annual Symposium, Ein-Shams University, Cairo, Egypt.

Roodt, S., Peier, D. (2013). Using YouTube in the classroom for the net generation of students. *Issues In Informing Science and Information Technology, 2013*(10), 473-488. University of Southern California. (2020, October 2). Faculty homepage: Stephen Krashen. Retrieved from http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/LLL/LLL_homepage.html

Watkins, J., Wilkins, M. (2011). Using YouTube in the EFL classroom. *Language Education in Asia, 2*(1). 113-119.

York, J. (2011). Reasons for using YouTube in the language classroom including practical usage examples. *The JALT CALL Journal:Forum, 7*(2), 207-215.