

Student-Created Videos for *Esprit de Corps* in an Arabic Classroom

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This article discusses how I utilized student-created video projects to enhance morale, increase student engagement and motivation, and foster active participation in the learning process. I collected informal feedback on the project through interviews with students, daily in-class observations, and coaching sessions with the teacher, both individually and in groups, as well as students' bi-weekly class presentations of video projects. Additional feedback was elicited from faculty and student comments after these videos were posted on Microsoft's Viva Engage (formerly Yammer), a communication platform that allows individuals in an organization to connect. I outline how I conducted the project and also share feedback.

Keywords: *Multimodality, Student-Created Video Projects, Motivation, Engagement, Active Participation, Group Work*

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that project-based group work can bring motivation and engagement to the classroom, but which projects to choose and how to structure them is up to the teacher's discretion. One project-based option is for students to collaborate on creating videos. When students make videos on topics of interest to them, it can benefit the student by helping them "document their knowledge, reflect on the learning process, and teach their classmates to do new things" (Sears, 2018, para. 3). These projects can therefore increase student motivation to learn by engaging them and encouraging their active participation and collaboration in classroom activities, taking them out of their daily classroom routine. As students work collaboratively, they reflect on their learning, consider ways to improve their videos, and share classmates' feedback on the language and culture content of the videos.

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Author's Positionalities

More than five years ago, I envisioned the benefits of having students practice writing scenarios they created and record them; in doing so, they build self-confidence and reinforce their target language use. The pandemic and the need to conduct online teaching became the spark to experiment with new opportunities that technology offered. In 2021, I started the practice of having students in my classrooms create videos and witnessed the blossoming of our students' enthusiasm and motivation to get on board with this initiative.

I started publishing my students' videos from different classes that I had taught throughout the years in *Chronicles*, a digital student newsletter, at the Arabic School and posted them in Microsoft's Viva Engage (formerly Yammer). In time, I also posted the videos of the students from other teams in my school, as well as other schools in DLIFLC's undergraduate education college.

Videos created by my students have covered topics such as immersions, cultural events at the Arabic Schools (then two, now one), students' hobbies and talents, scenarios, sketches, songs, dances, presentations, and traditions. Gradually, teachers from other DLIFLC language programs have joined this initiative, but it was heavily implemented in the Arabic program. I received positive and encouraging feedback from the management of the Arabic program, faculty members, students, and MLIs. In this article, I will share the steps I took to help students create their videos and the feedback I have received.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Project-Based Group Work

Properly organized group work can contribute to student learning, retention, and retrieval of content and overall college success. Well-structured group work helps students plan and manage their time productively, develop better communication skills, combine knowledge and different skill sets, delegate their roles and responsibilities to perform the assigned tasks, share varying perspectives, and negotiate their differences in opinion. Well-designed group projects can also help students build their communication skills and become more engaged in class as they create a shared identity (Astin, 1997; Tinto, 1998).

While the benefits of group work for learners are undeniable, instructors should plan, supervise, and assess group work in a way that enhances meaningful teamwork and collaboration; otherwise, it may not lead to the desired outcome. Instructors should assign as group work those tasks that accurately meet the learning objectives of the course and successfully lend themselves to student collaboration.

Student-Created Video Projects

Student-created video projects can offer many benefits. The key is in how they are viewed by the instructor. Sears (2018), in her work with younger learners, considered her students working in small groups not “just consumers of videos,” but as creators who work together to shape and “share their opinions and skills with the world” (para. 2). She found that student-made videos naturally fit the classroom and tapped into students’ interests and behaviors and easily related them to audiences so that they can not only share what they’ve learned but also reflect on the learning process and teach others. Student-created videos can improve student engagement, improve self-confidence, and enhance autonomous learning (Anas, 2019; Stanley & Zhang, 2018). Video sharing can also help build a sense of class community (Cowie & Sakui, 2021). Given the motivational and interpersonal challenges facing my students, I selected the project of student-created videos to support their engagement as well as language learning.

CONTEXT

The five students in the class involved in this project started their Arabic language studies at the DLIFLC in January 2023 with a different teaching team; I started working with them in their third month at the DLIFLC. They were reticent to speak the target language, and due to initial team experiences and low grades in the program, lacked self-confidence and motivation to learn Arabic; as a group, they suffered from low morale. Hence, in the first couple of months, our teaching team’s focus was on gaining their trust and building their motivation. We aimed to create harmony among the students and build a functional group of learners. One of these initiatives was the video project described here, following the guidelines for student-created video projects outlined in Anas (2019).

STEPS FOR STUDENT-CREATED VIDEO PROJECT

The following are the steps I followed for the project. All project discussion was conducted in the target language.

1. *Preparation and Project Orientation:* Starting in mid-Semester II, I showed the class student-created videos on a variety of cultural topics from previous classes posted on Viva Engage. I also explained that the purpose of the project was to develop Arabic language skills along with an increased motivation and interest in the language and culture.
2. *Project Assignment:* I assigned video projects according to their interests, with the first video project about Mother’s Day 2023. In the videos, they wrote cards to their mothers in Arabic and recited the content of their cards in front of their classmates (see Appendix A for a list of all topics). I provided each student with guidelines for their video projects (Appendix B) and followed up on their progress regularly so that I could answer questions and check on the quality of the content.

3. *Student Script Creation*: Students read materials to write their scenarios, which most of the time were part of their homework. I gave them feedback on their errors in the scenarios, and they rehearsed their narrations before recording and incorporating them into their videos. I read their scripts carefully and discussed the process with them to ensure they did not just copy and paste other content. I wanted to ensure their scripts were original.
4. *Individual or Group Assignments*: I assigned individual, pair, or group work depending on their interests and experiences, considering their learning styles and personality types so that they would work harmoniously with each other, keeping their other class work and duties in mind.
5. *Timelines and Homework*: I considered the timing of these projects so as not to overwhelm the class, as they had other responsibilities. Their video-related homework was generally assigned for longer weekends. I established deadlines for writing their scenarios and allocated a sufficient amount of time in class for corrections, practice, and rehearsals so the students could feel confident before the recording sessions.
6. *Video Creation*: Students recorded themselves or worked with a partner to make the video recordings. For pictures, students either took their own or used copyright-free images from Wikimedia Commons. To stitch the audio and images together, students used either iMovie or Quick Time Player (both approved for DLIFLC use). Students who had less experience with these tools worked in groups with more-experienced partners, to minimize the time spent on technology and maximize the time spent on creating and recording the content. In some cases, I did the final stitching together of a video to facilitate and streamline the process for the students. Each video took approximately one hour to assemble.
7. *Sharing the Videos*: With the students' permission, I posted their videos on the DLIFLC's Viva Engage so that other students and teachers could watch them. Since this tool is only accessible to DLIFLC faculty/staff, it is secure. I also instructed students not to share these videos outside DLIFLC for security reasons, and I instructed them to remove any recordings or images from their personal phones.
8. *Project Impact and Feedback*: Feedback for this project was gathered through interviews with the students, in-class observations of student progress by the researcher, individual coaching sessions with students by the researcher, and observations by the researcher of their bi-weekly presentations on their projects. I interviewed each student one-on-one before graduation to assess the benefits and challenges of the student-created videos initiative and gather feedback to improve this initiative for the upcoming classes.

The five students in this project produced eight videos (4–7 minutes in length) in total, both individually and in groups. As their instructor, I allocated a considerable amount of time for coaching them when they were working on their video projects, as it related to the information they would include, the writing of their scripts, and the speaking and pronunciation of Arabic. I focused on a team dynamic of motivation and enjoyment, but kept the focus on the language

skills and cultural information they were developing. I spent minimal class time on the actual technology, compared to the content and speaking practice.

REFLECTIONS AND FEEDBACK

I wanted to see if student-created videos could help students improve morale, build self-confidence, increase motivation and engagement, and encourage active participation of students in their learning process. Feedback from the students and teacher/researcher observations on this question follow.

Video Project Benefits

Based on the information gathered, these video projects appeared to have met my goal for building student engagement and confidence. All five students expressed that they liked this initiative because it helped prevent burnout, improved morale, increased motivation and engagement, and enhanced collaboration. They all said they were enthusiastic about writing scenarios and recording them.

Students mentioned that the video projects were helpful because some of them were naturally shy or lacked communication skills. They learned to trust each other when collaborating to make these videos. They thought these projects improved their pronunciation and helped them recognize their deficiencies in speaking ability when they watched the videos repeatedly. They also enjoyed the opportunity to critique each other's videos to improve them.

The students recommended this initiative for future classes because it broke the monotony, helped them share knowledge about the video topics, and distracted them from worrying about final graduation-requirement testing. They also felt the language they used when interacting with each other was useful for developing real-life proficiency, showed them that they knew more than they thought they did, also an opportunity to grow professionally and build confidence. The class leader considered the projects important because they were posted on Viva Engage, and they had to exert more effort to ensure that the spoken language they used was accurate in terms of grammar, word choice, and pronunciation.

My observations of the students revealed that over time, their behavior became more engaged; they became willing to collaborate and tried to speak more. Some students even became comfortable enough to improvise during recordings, when applicable, showing that they were becoming more fluent with Arabic. They also seemed to appreciate that they could share their talents; those with more technology skills could teach and help their peers. Students appeared to be very proud of their videos when they saw them on the shared Viva Engage and when other students or teachers commented on them. They were able to share their own experiences making the videos, and they could see the progress they made over time. This seemed to give them great satisfaction.

I also observed, and other teachers commented, that the students overcame their differences and wanted to study together as a class, rather than being taught Arabic in separate groups, which was the case when we received this class, when they didn't want to study together. Challenging and cheering one another about each other's accomplishments and improvement in their grades resulted in a positive change in their attitudes. They began to ask for more activities like this and were enthusiastic about showing their talents and skills publicly. Their enthusiasm for collaboration also became obvious in their discussions of their group projects. They worked as a team and enjoyed each other's company in and out of the classroom. In addition, their healthy competition resulted in high morale and joy from learning despite their heavy academic and military workload.

Video Project Challenges

One of the main challenges was time. The student-made videos initiative was extra work for the students in addition to their academic and military duties. I tried to minimize this concern by including the video projects as part of their homework and also by reducing the time spent on technology, but this continued to be a concern for some students, especially those less tech-savvy. Due to time requirements, in the future, it might be more beneficial to decrease the number of video projects or introduce the videos in Semester I so they would have more time. I also found out that students worked harder in preparing for their class presentations when they were for a wider audience, rather than just their classmates. In this way, the tool Viva Engage was crucial.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Properly structured group work helps students plan and manage their time productively, and combine knowledge and different skill sets to complete the assigned tasks, all while collaborating and building confidence and engagement. For the successful implementation of group work, I created a safe and comfortable environment for my students. In this safe environment, they opened up to each other and shared their strengths and limitations without any reservations. They expressed the types of topics that interested them in relation to their previous life experiences. I generally gave them the freedom to choose a classmate to partner with. As they were collaborating, they developed their voice. They listened to each other when solving problems to achieve successful outcomes. I supervised and assessed their group work to ensure it enhanced meaningful teamwork and collaboration on the quality of the work that they had produced. All these factors contributed to the successful implementation of group work in this class.

This project allowed me to meet my goals for building student confidence and class morale. The guidelines were provided by Anas (2019). The pre-task orientation segment allowed me to explain the purpose and steps of the project, along with the timeline and examples. The during-task phase included tasks ranging from groups planning their projects to recording and editing their videos. For post-task reflection, the class shared their videos with classmates, reflecting on

the task and how it impacted their confidence, proficiency in speaking, and motivation. Following these guidelines led to a successful project, where students were able to make meaning and be active participants in their learning, benefits also noted by Anas (2019).

With the student-created videos initiative, students put into practice all their skills and were surprised by how much they had learned from mid Semester II until end-Semester III. They collaborated, had fun, adapted to the changes in the script as they were improvising their scenarios using Arabic. Posting these projects on Viva Engage raised the bar high for this class; they worked harder for their classmates, faculty members, staff, and their families. For future iterations of this project, I would consider asking the students to create fewer videos, due to the time needed. An action research project on this topic would allow for a more complete understanding of the degree to which student-created content can help build student morale and engagement.

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APPENDIX A

Topics Assigned

1. Mother's Postcard 2023
2. Denim Day-Jeans in Arabic 2023
3. Halloween class activity 2023
4. Class break trip 2023
5. Class Presentations 2023
6. Thanksgiving class activity 2023
7. Christmas Tree Wishes 2023
8. Christmas Department Activity 2023

APPENDIX B

Guidelines Given to Students

1. You will abide by the set deadlines for every stage of the project
2. You will read relevant materials to prepare original scenarios, not just copy and paste,
3. You will submit your scenarios to me for feedback,
4. You will rehearse and then record the narrations of the scenarios once they are revised based on my feedback.
5. You will use copyright-free pictures for your video projects,
6. You will use applications approved by the DLIFLC.
7. You will not share these videos outside the DLIFLC for security reasons.
8. You will remove any recordings or images from your phones.