# Producing Travel Vlogs as a Collaborative Task in English Classes With a Soft CLIL Approach

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#### Abstract

Producing travel vlogs is a way to record events and memories of a trip and share them with others. Takahashi (2022a) analyzed YouTube-style videos of six genres made individually by EFL university students and pointed out the necessity of adjusting the task for more collaborative learning and language learning. In response to this, the current study assigned a collaborative travel vlog producing task to new groups of EFL university students and addressed the following research questions. 1) How and to what extent does this task contribute to language learning and content learning in English communication classes with a soft CLIL approach? 2) Which task functions better as a CLIL task, a travel vlog producing task or a YouTube-style video making task? Twenty-nine students from two universities in Japan participated and produced 13 travel vlogs either in pairs or in groups collaboratively. Following the framework of Takahashi (2022a) to enable comparison, the content of the travel vlogs and the responses on the worksheets were analyzed qualitatively and the English voice-over was analyzed linguistically. The results showed that the travel vlog producing task enabled the participants to produce target linguistic expressions in an authentic context and that collaboration with their peers promoted active engagement in the task. Specifying the genre to travel vlogs helped to make the learning goals clearer both in terms of language and content, and therefore, the task proved to be more suitable as a CLIL task.

Keywords: Travel Vlog, English Language Education, EFL, CLIL, Task, Collaborative Learning

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the travel industry greatly. International travel became significantly difficult as countries closed their borders in order to restrict the inflow of people from outside of the country. In fact, the World Tourism Organization (2022) reported that the number of international tourists decreased by more than 70% in 2020 and 2021 in comparison to 2019. Domestic travel was also negatively affected by the pandemic because people were encouraged to minimize the time they spent outside of their home. In Japan, the first state of emergency was declared in April 2020, leading to a sudden drop in the number of domestic travelers. The government temporarily conducted a campaign to promote travelling in the latter half of the year. However, the total number of domestic travelers still dropped by half in 2020 compared to the previous year, and this trend did not change in 2021 (Japan Tourism Agency, 2021, 2022a).

In 2022, the number of domestic tourists gradually started to increase again in Japan (Japan Tourism Agency, 2022b, 2022c). With the relative containment of the pandemic, more and more people are resuming travelling. The number of international travelers is also rapidly increasing again across the world, "with arrivals reaching 62% of pre-pandemic levels in the first nine months of 2022" (World Tourism Organization, 2022). One way to record events and memories of a trip and share them with others is to make a travel vlog. A vlog means a blog in the format of a video, and travel vloggers have recently achieved popularity (He et al., 2022). There are numerous travel vlogs uploaded on video sharing websites such as YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/). A search on YouTube by using the keyword "travel vlogs" shows that vlogs on many countries are available on the platform.

English travel vlogs can be utilized as language teaching materials in English language classes. For example, Takahashi (2022b) pointed out that videos uploaded on YouTube are potentially suitable as authentic materials for learning different varieties of English. More specifically, the study focused on Asian Englishes and described corpus-based activities, audio-based activities, and video-based activities that had been carried out in the classroom. The study then suggested two activities, namely, finding videos activity and watching videos activity, as video-based activities for exposing students to Asian Englishes that could be carried out in a relatively short period of time during the class (pp. 622-623).

Students can play a more active role by engaging in video producing tasks and activities, and English language teachers have implemented such tasks and activities in the classroom (e.g., Chen, 2018; Hamilton, 2010; Hafner, 2014; H. Huang, 2015; H. W. Huang, 2021; Miller, 2007; Yeh et al., 2020). For instance, Aksel and Gürman-Kahraman (2014) conducted a survey to 100 university students in Turkey to assess the participants' perceptions of effectiveness of video producing tasks on their language skills and the process of language learning. The study showed that the university students' perceptions of the tasks were either positive or neutral, leading the researchers to conclude that the implementation of tasks involving the use of information technology tools can produce a positive impact in the language classroom. Indeed, mobile devices such as smartphones enable university students to diversify the ways they approach learning (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

This means that video producing tasks can be implemented in English communication courses as well. The current study was held in two English communication classes at two universities in Japan, and the lesson plans for both classes had been developed based on a soft CLIL approach. CLIL is the acronym for content and language integrated learning, which is

"a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Mehisto et al., 2008, p. 9; see also Ball et al., 2015; Coyle, 1999, 2007; Coyle et al., 2009). The primary focus of hard CLIL is on content learning, whereas the primary focus of soft CLIL is on language learning (Ikeda, 2013). Both of the courses aimed to have students develop their English communication skills by using materials which also enabled them to acquire knowledge of topics relevant to today's society. At the same time, the emphasis of the courses was on language development, and therefore, the approach adopted was soft CLIL. Two other relevant approaches, namely, communicative language teaching (e.g., Littlewood, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Savignon, 2005; Spada, 2007) and task-based language teaching (e.g., Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014; Nunan, 2006) also influenced the development of the lesson plans.

As mentioned above, studies have attested to positive effects of video producing tasks for language learning. However, researchers have tended to focus on perceptions of the participants or on the development of language skills and motivation rather than the content of the videos, and not many studies have analyzed the videos produced by the participants in detail. Takahashi (2022a) looked at this gap in the literature and reported the results of a YouTube-style video making task in English communication courses with a soft CLIL approach. The participants were allowed to choose any genre from videos observed on YouTube. The courses were held online due to the pandemic, and the majority of the videos were produced individually. By analyzing the videos and the comments, the study concluded that the task was an enjoyable and motivational task that could promote various aspects of learning.

However, there were two main demerits of the task implemented in Takahashi (2022a). One was the difficulty in providing focused language instruction because of the diverse variety of genres. The other was the lack of collaboration because of the format of the courses. Collaborative learning is defined as "instructional arrangements that involve two or more students working together on a shared learning goal" and its positive impact on learning has been proved (Van Leeuwen & Janssen, 2019, p. 71; see also Dillenbourg, 1999; Kaendler, 2015). In order to address the problems of the YouTube-style video making task, the current study limited the genre to travel vlogs, which was the most popular genre in the previous task, and implemented a travel vlog producing task in English communication classes.

There were two research questions in this study. 1) How and to what extent does a collaborative travel vlog producing task contribute to language learning and content learning in English communication classes with a soft CLIL approach? 2) Which task functions better as a CLIL task, a travel vlog producing task or a YouTube-style video making task? To investigate the second research question, comparison was conducted with Takahashi (2022a). In order to enable a direct comparison, it was necessary to follow the same framework. In the following, Takahashi (2022a) or the YouTube-style video making task refers to the task with no specification of the genre by the instructor. On the other hand, the travel vlog producing task, which is the focus of the current study, refers to the task for which the instructor specified the genre to travel vlogs.

# Methodology

# **Participants and Context**

Twenty-nine university students from two English communication classes participated in this study. They were from two universities (University A and University B) in Japan. In other words, this study was conducted in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting. Seventeen students were first year students from University A, and 12 students were second year students from University B. Both classes were labeled as the upper intermediate level. The classes were held all in English, and the researcher herself was the instructor. This study took place in the fall semester (September to January) of the academic year 2021 when some classes were still held online because of the pandemic. The English communication class at University A met once a week for 14 weeks, and the classes were held online and on-campus alternately throughout the semester. The class at University B met once a week for 15 weeks; the classes were initially held online and on-campus alternately but were held on-campus every week from November. The students had studied with the same classmates in the spring semester, and they knew each other well.

## **Materials**

The travel vlog producing task was assigned as the final project for both classes. Both of the classes had been using a textbook, and the participants had spent two weeks on topics relevant to media studies before being introduced to the final project. For pre-tasks, the instructor prepared a playlist consisting of 10 English travel vlogs she found on YouTube. The videos had been produced by different travel vloggers and were on various cities across the world. For the main task, the instructor prepared an instruction sheet and a worksheet. The instruction sheet outlined the details of the final project and also provided the grading criteria (language, content, delivery, structure, and length), and the worksheet had questions for the participants to look back on the project. The questions were kept the same as Takahashi (2022a) and asked the participants to describe the topic and important points of their video, things they liked about the project, and things they found difficult about the project.

## **Procedure**

There were two pre-tasks before the main task. First, the participants watched short segments of several of the travel vlogs from the YouTube playlist the instructor had compiled. They were then asked to identify salient features of the content of the travel vlogs in groups. The instructor also encouraged them to watch other travel vlogs outside of the class time. Second, the instructor pointed out frequently occurring expressions and vocabulary in travel vlogs and drew the participants' attention to linguistic features observed in travel vlogs by using examples from the vlogs they had watched as the first pre-task. The instructor also emphasized that it was important to use descriptive adjectives and adverbs to convey the atmosphere of the places.

The participants then chose a partner or group members and spent the rest of the class time to start planning their vlog. They then had around one and a half months to complete the task by following these six steps: choosing the place(s) to visit, planning the vlog, filming the vlog, editing it, checking it, and uploading it onto OneDrive with the worksheet. The video had to be at least five minute long in the case of pair projects, and seven minute long in the case of

group projects. In the final class, the participants watched the travel vlogs together and made comments on each other's vlog. The instructor also provided feedback to the class at the end. All of the participants indicated that they would let the instructor analyze their travel vlogs and report the results for academic purposes.

# **Results and Analysis**

All the vlogs were collaborative projects, and 13 videos were produced in total. Ten were pair projects and three were group projects. The average length of one vlog was five minutes and six seconds. The data were analyzed from the two aspects of content and language, following the framework of Takahashi (2022a), to enable a direct comparison with this previous study. This was also because the classes were based on a soft CLIL approach.

# **Learning Goals**

It is necessary to describe the learning goals of the travel vlog producing task before analyzing the data. Regarding content, there were four learning goals: 1) To be able to choose places both members are interested in, gather information on potential spots to visit online, and make plans for the vlog. 2) To be able to record and summarize important moments of the trip in the format of a video. 3) To be able to edit and produce a vlog that is informative and educational for the audience to watch. 4) To be able to work on the project collaboratively with their partner. The 4Cs framework, which consists of content, cognition, communication, and culture or community, has been one of the leading frameworks of CLIL (Coyle, 1999, 2007; Coyle et al., 2009; Mehisto et al., 2008). These content learning goals of the task were mainly relevant to content, cognition, community/ culture among the 4Cs of CLIL.

There were also four learning goals regarding language: 1) To be able to introduce places they visited in English. 2) To be able to use a wide range of expressions and vocabulary accurately to talk out the places they visited. 3) To be able to speak English clearly and fluently. 4) To be able to control the speed and the level of English so that the audience can understand the vlog easily. These goals were mostly relevant to the communication aspect of the 4Cs.

#### **Content**

Following Takahashi (2022a), this study analyzed the content of the vlogs in terms of their pattern, features of frequent occurrence, additional features, and commonly observed themes in the comments. Unlike Takahashi (2022a), all the videos were of the same genre because of the requirement of the task.

## **Patterns and Examples**

The travel vlogs were categorized into four patterns based on their content as shown in Table 1. The first pattern focused on various tourist spots in the city or prefecture the pair had chosen. Six vlogs were in this pattern and each video introduced tourist spots in Osaka (two videos), Kyoto (two videos), Kobe, or Shizuoka. The second pattern focused on one specific tourist spot. There were three videos of this pattern, describing places such as an airport in Osaka and one of the local botanical gardens near University B. The third pattern highlighted shops and restaurants such as bakeries and ramen restaurants in one area. Three videos

showed this pattern. The fourth pattern was on events (one video), and the video focused on winter illuminations. In the YouTube-style video making task, all the travel vlogs were of the first pattern. This was probably because those who wanted to choose other genres could freely choose their topic in that task. In other words, in the travel vlog producing task, the participants tried to find suitable topics for them within the given framework. For each pattern, screenshots of a representative vlog are shown below in Figure 1 to Figure 4 along with some of the comments provided by the participants who produced the respective vlogs.

Table 1: Four Patterns of Travel Vlogs

| 1. Various tourist spots | 6 videos (46.2%) |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| 2. One tourist spot      | 3 videos (23.1%) |
| 3. Shops and restaurants | 3 videos (23.1%) |
| 4. Events                | 1 video (7.7%)   |



Figure 1: Osaka Travel Vlog

Figure 1 shows screenshots from the travel vlog of Osaka produced by a pair from University A. In this vlog, the students visited and introduced multiple sightseeing spots in one of the most touristic areas of Osaka. One of the students wrote, "We explained each spot in detail and made it an easy-to-understand video," and "We were able to work together on this project." The other student wrote, "I felt that I could deepen my relationship with my partner and improve my speaking English ability." As the comments indicated, the students emphasized that they enjoyed working together collaboratively.



Figure 2: Travel Vlog of Osaka International Airport

Figure 2 illustrates the second pattern. In this travel vlog, another pair from University A visited Osaka International Airport and introduced the airport in detail. One of the students wrote, "I learned about how to make a good opening movie from other vlogs on YouTube," and the other student wrote, "We could divide the work. For example, [my partner] wrote the manuscript, and I edited the video. Also, I don't usually take videos, so it was good experience." This confirmed that at least some of the students watched other travel vlogs outside of the class time in order to prepare for their vlog.

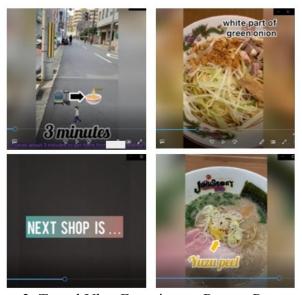


Figure 3: Travel Vlog Focusing on Ramen Restaurants

Figure 3 shows an example of the third pattern. In this vlog, two students from University A went to famous ramen restaurants near the university and introduced the route to the restaurants, their locations, and the ramen dishes of their recommendation. This pattern still qualified as a travel vlog because the students explored the area of their choice. One of the students wrote, "I experience[d] making [a] 5-minute movie for the first time," and the other wrote, "I chose simple English word[s] in after-recording." This indicated their awareness of the audience when they produced the vlog.



Figure 4: Travel Vlog of Winter Illuminations

Figure 4 shows screenshots of the vlog on winter illuminations in Osaka. This was the only vlog in the data that focused on special events. This was produced by a group of three students from University A, and one of them wrote, "[I]t was a lot of fun because [...] there were various processes such as taking an image by myself, adding music, and adding audio. Also, I enjoyed watching the videos of other pairs and seeing the differences in how to shoot and edit the videos." This indicated that the task was an enjoyable process for the student who made this comment.

# **Features of Frequent Occurrence**

The two features that were salient in Takahashi (2022a) were also frequently observed in the travel vlogs. First, English subtitles and on-screen textual information were often added to the vlogs. In the travel vlog producing task, eight videos (61.6%) contained textual information, and this was almost exactly the same proportion (61.7%) as in the YouTube-style video making task. However, a higher proportion of the travel vlogs (46.2%) contained detailed subtitles in comparison to the YouTube-style videos (21.3%). This indicated that more students added detailed textual information to the videos in the case of travel vlogs. This also helped the audience understand the content of the videos more easily.

Second, background music was often added to the vlogs. In fact, almost all the videos (12 videos, 92.3%) contained background music throughout the video, and this proportion was higher than that in the YouTube-style video making task (68.1%). The travel vlogs the students had watched as part of the pre-task had background music, and this might have motivated them to add background music to their vlogs as well.

#### **Additional Features**

Another feature worth noting was that most of the participants appeared in the travel vlogs. In more than half of the vlogs (8 videos, 61.6%), both members clearly showed their faces while showing around the tourist spots in the video. In addition, one of the members briefly made an appearance in four of the vlogs (30.8%), for example, when introducing the food at a restaurant. There was only one vlog (7.7%) in which the participants never made an appearance. In Takahashi (2022a), only 36.2% of the participants showed their faces in the

video. This means that the participants were more willing to appear in the videos in the case of the travel vlog producing task.

There are two possible reasons why there was this difference between the two tasks. One possibility is that the participants had more opportunities to interact with each other face-to-face on campus even though the atmosphere of the classes did not differ that much. Another, and more likely, possibility is that collaborative projects made it easier for the participants to appear in the video because one of the members could film the other member.

In addition, the participants demonstrated their editing skills by thoroughly editing their vlogs even though the detailed editing was not part of the requirement. Most of the participants used their smartphones rather than computers to edit the video. They used various applications, and the most popular application for editing among the participants was CapCut, closely followed by InShot.

## **Commonly Observed Themes in the Comments**

The worksheets were submitted by all the participants individually. The researcher classified their comments regarding the task into positive points and points of improvement and identified themes which occurred repeatedly. As good points, the participants commented that the project was a good opportunity to spend time with their classmates. They also thought editing the vlog was fun and meaningful although it was challenging for some of them. In addition, they mentioned that the project became a chance to learn about audience awareness. Aside from editing, some of the participants raised the schedule management as one of the challenging points. These comments indicated that collaboration was the key of this travel vlog producing task. Even though it was difficult for some of them to manage the schedule, they enjoyed working with their classmates. The instructor had let the participants choose their own partner, and that was likely to have contributed to good teamwork.

## Language

This study analyzed the language aspect of the travel vlogs in terms of vocabulary, expressions, sentence types, constructions, pronunciation, and paralinguistic features, following what Takahashi (2022a) had highlighted. All the participants had written a script before recording a voice-over, so the language under analysis was scripted spoken language. They were instructed not to use machine translation when writing the script. The researcher transcribed all the audio data before conducing this part of the analysis.

## **Vocabulary and Expressions**

The average number of tokens per video was 383.3 and the average number of types was 160.9. This was calculated along with word frequency by using AntConc (Anthony, 2020) with Someya Lemma List (no hypens). Although the number of tokens was larger than that in the YouTube-style video making task (333.8 tokens on average) mainly because of the longer length of the videos, the average number of tokens (158.4 types on average) as well as TTR (0.441 on average in this task and 0.475 in the previous task) remained almost the same across the two tasks.

Table 2 shows words which appeared at a high frequency in the travel vlogs. The number in the parentheses indicates the raw frequency in the data. As the table indicates, high frequency

words tended to be common words such as take, eat, buy, bread, station, and shop. There were some differences from the YouTube-style video producing task, but this was likely due to the differences in the genre. The range of descriptive adjectives was still limited in the travel vlog producing task despite specific instruction and encouragement to use them. The infrequent use of higher-level words in the travel vlog producing task could be attributed the genre itself because travel vlogs did not necessitate the use of difficult vocabulary. This could also be because the participants had their audience in mind when they wrote the script for the vlogs.

|                | 1   |
|----------------|---|
| Verbs          | be (303), see (38), have (37), take (27), eat (26), buy (17),   |
|                | get (17), arrive (15), want (15), introduce (14), enjoy (13),   |
|                | come (12), let (11), walk (11)                                  |
| Nouns and      | we (185), it (112), this (74), I (73), you (59), bread (32),    |
| Pronouns       | station (26), shop (25), time (18), Christmas (17), Osaka (17), |
|                | place (15), illumination (13), people (13), picture (12),       |
|                | point (12), cream (11), day (11)                                |
| Adjectives and | there (78), very (32), beautiful (19), delicious (16),          |

Table 2: Words of Frequent Occurrence (Lemmatized)

The students were able to choose and use accurate expressions that matched each scene and at an appropriate timing. For example, Figure 5 shows screenshots of a scene from a university campus tour vlog produced by a pair from University B. The name of the cafeteria is hidden in the figure. For this scene, one of the students added a voice-over, saying "It is not so crowded, so you can relax. If you have left your lunch at your home, this dining hall will help you. You can get a variety of food."

famous (9), again (8), finally (8), little (8), cute (7)



Figure 5: Introducing the University Cafeteria

# **Sentence Types and Constructions**

Adverbs

The students were able to use a wide range of sentence types and constructions to describe the places they had visited. For instance, Figure 6 illustrates a scene from a travel vlog of botanical gardens in Osaka narrated by a group of students from University B. The left side of the screenshot was clopped in order to hide the names of the students. In this scene, the students said, "Stepping into the first section, it's a humid tropical plant house. You are instantly immersed in the world of a tropical jungle. I enjoyed Lotus Garden. Water lilies are beautiful, and the leaves are so big!" In this part alone, the students used a participle clause and passive voice. In terms of the sentence types, this part contained two simple sentences, one compound sentence, and one complex sentence.



Figure 6: Travel Vlog of Botanical Gardens

At the same time, constructions such as past perfect and second conditional did not appear in the travel vlogs unlike in the YouTube-style videos. This might once again be attributed to the genre of travel vlogs itself. There were some grammatical mistakes such as mistakes regarding verb forms (e.g., after walk around...) and lack of articles (e.g., which is symbol of) in the voice over of the travel vlogs, but they did not affect comprehensibility. This was the same tendency as Takahashi (2022a).

# **Pronunciation and Paralinguistic Features**

The same tendency as Takahashi (2022a) was also observed regarding pronunciation. The participants were able to speak English clearly and intelligibly in the vlogs. There were some Japanese English features such as the use of a voiced alveolar tap instead of a voiced alveolar lateral approximant in the audio data. All the participants added a voice-over in the travel vlog producing task, and this helped them speak English clearly because they could look at the script and could also record it multiple times until they were satisfied with the quality.

The majority of the participants showed their faces in the vlogs as stated above, and they were able to use paralinguistic features adequately and effectively. For example, the students who visited a café as part of their Kyoto travel vlog smiled at the camera together and showed their coffee to the camera.

## **Discussion**

This study had two research questions. For the first research question, "How and to what extent does a collaborative travel vlog producing task contribute to language learning and content learning in English communication classes with a soft CLIL approach?", the travel vlog producing task enabled the participants to achieve all the four content learning goals of the task, indicating that this task fulfilled the content criteria of a soft CLIL task. The

participants also did well regarding language learning goals and demonstrated their English speaking skills. However, the range of expressions and vocabulary was not very wide and some of the participants could have worked on the clarity and fluency of their voice-over in English. The instructor had provided explicit and focused language instruction as part of the pre-task, but it might have been necessary to offer more advice during the script writing and practicing process to increase the accuracy and complexity of the English voice-over.

For the second discussion question, "Which task functions better as a CLIL task, a travel vlog producing task or a YouTube-style video making task?", each task had its own merits. The travel vlog producing task enabled an opportunity to provide focused language instruction because the genre was specific. In addition, it was possible to provide clearer learning goals in terms of content and language. Moreover, it enabled a fairer evaluation because the genre had been pre-determined by the instructor and the outcome was more predictable. For these reasons, this task seems to be more suitable as a CLIL task for classes which require more language support. On the other hand, the YouTube-style video making task allowed more flexibility. The participants could choose their genre freely, and thus the task became more engaging. This also meant that there were more opportunities for autonomous learning. Therefore, this task seems to be more suitable for advanced classes. For both tasks, working collaboratively in pairs or in small groups seems to enhance the quality of learning experience for classes with a friendly atmosphere because it can provide opportunities for collaborative learning.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the travel vlog producing task proved to be a suitable and motivational CLIL task in English communication classes with a soft CLIL approach in an EFL setting. It is a task that can promote collaborative and autonomous learning, audience awareness, and technology skills. In addition, it can provide clearer content and language learning goals compared to YouTube-style video making tasks. Explicit and focused language instruction is helpful, but what students learn in the pre-task stage is not necessarily reflected in the travel vlogs themselves. Therefore, it is necessary for language instructors to intervene in the process of script writing and practicing as well to help students improve the complexity and accuracy of the English voice-over. It is also difficult to encourage students to use higher level vocabulary in this genre, but other advantages seem to outweigh this demerit.

This study did not involve quantitative assessments of the participants' pre- and post-task English language skills related to travel vlogs, and this was a potential limitation. In addition, the English level of both classes was upper intermediate, and the possibility of implementing this task in a lower-level English class remains to be seen. Furthermore, the possibility of utilizing machine translation as language assistance can be explored with regard to travel vlog producing tasks in a future study.

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