Promoting Speaking Outside of Class Through Flipgrid

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Speaking practice is an important aspect of second language acquisition because a lack of spontaneous speaking opportunities can lead to less automatization and slower processing, as well as fewer feelings of competence and confidence in the second language. However, assignments given for homework typically do not give students the opportunity to practice speaking. In order to address this lack of speaking practice outside of class, Flipgrid was implemented in eight second-year university classes to provide students with spontaneous speaking practice. Flipgrid is a Microsoft-operated, free social learning platform that allows teachers to create original topics which students can respond to via video. In this paper we discuss set up and basic use of Flipgrid, the positive and negative aspects of using Flipgrid, its limitations, a brief outline of how it was used in classes, student reactions, and other ways it could be used in an EFL class.

Many EFL learners admit wanting to improve their speaking abilities yet have frustration and a lack of confidence when attempting to do so. Kitano (2001) hypothesized that because the majority of learners believed speaking skills to be the most important, they then experienced more self-created and self-focused pressure on being successful in speaking. In addition, Marzec-Stawiarska (2015) found that out of 54 masters students in a university English department, more than half were worried about fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, the content of their oral performances, errors, and communication with native speakers. This example suggests that many learners are not satisfied with their speaking skills which can then be compounded by a lack of speaking practice outside of the classroom. Many students do not have the opportunity to speak with someone

in English outside of the classroom, yet research into EFL and SLA have found that speaking skills remain one of the most harshly judged skills, in terms of accentedness and comprehensibility (Saito et al., 2016). This pressure and desire to improve students' speaking skills has prompted many teachers to implement spontaneous communicative speaking tasks inside the classroom. Spontaneous communicative speaking comprises any activities when students speak without planning or preparation, such as discussing texts, group discussions, interviews, information gaps, describing objects, telling stories or jokes, jigsaw activities, etc. These are any activities when students speak without planning or preparation that use their implicit knowledge (Spada & Tomita, 2010). The promotion of speaking fluency development in students' L2 has been proven important at all levels of proficiency (Nation & Newton, 2008), not only because of motivational factors, but also because it also helps the learners automatize and advance their language use, and it is a crucial part of second language learning (Kayi, 2012). However, it is also quite easy for students to completely avoid speaking English outside of the classroom, possibly due to anxiety (McLain, 2018).

Moreover, it can be challenging for teachers to implement spontaneous speaking tasks outside the classroom. When teachers assign students to practice speaking aloud at home (such as practicing presentations, reading texts aloud, role plays, or other homework connected with in-class speaking activities), it is not spontaneous but planned. Moreover, even if spontaneous speaking is assigned, it can be difficult for students to prove that they have completed these tasks and difficult for teachers to check students' practice. One way to solve this problem is for students to create videos of themselves speaking.

Flipgrid (2019) is an ideal platform to address this issue because it gives students the chance to practice spontaneous speaking outside of the classroom while allowing teachers to check, assess, and provide feedback on student work. Again, spontaneous speaking in this article is referring to speaking that has not been planned (such as written out using dictionaries or translation software, memorized lines from a textbook or other text, or other ways of planning) but speaking that is unplanned, unprepared, and focused on communication and fluency development. Flipgrid combines aspects of social media platforms

and video capture tools to give students opportunities to practice spontaneous speaking outside of the classroom that they would typically not have. Flipgrid allows teachers to set topics (prompts) which students can respond to with videos. It is free and can be downloaded onto students' smartphones via the Apple Store or Google Play or used on a PC equipped with a webcam through the Flipgrid website. In this article, we aim to introduce Flipgrid as a tool for supporting spontaneous speaking practice by illustrating its use in our classes throughout a semester. We will consider our class background, how to set up a grid, and finally the advantages and disadvantages of using Flipgrid.

Class Background / Setting Up Flipgrid

Flipgrid was implemented in eight mandatory English communication classes (two different levels, Elementary English Communication III & IV, and Intermediate English Communication III & IV classes) with the objective of increasing opportunities for students to practice spontaneous speech. Four classes were elementary level (around CEFR A2), and the other four were intermediate level (around CEFR B1), though the individual levels within each class tended to vary. The course objectives for both courses stated, "The primary goal of this course is to develop students' ability and confidence in using English to communicate in informal, everyday situations." From these objectives, we believed that by implementing Flipgrid, we would be able to provide more opportunities for students to practice speaking English outside of the classroom, ultimately raising their confidence in speaking English.

To begin, Flipgrid must be configured for use with a teacher's classes. Teachers can label classes as groups called "grids" (Figure 1) either by registering student emails or school ID numbers (Figure 2). It is also possible to create unique student ID numbers if there is concern about student privacy or security. Alternatively, teachers can input an email domain (e.g., @schoolname.ac.jp), and this would allow students using an email address with this domain access to the grid. After creating a grid for each class, teachers create a short "Flip Code" which will become part of the URL used by students to access the grids (e.g., "Mon02" to denote the day and class period).

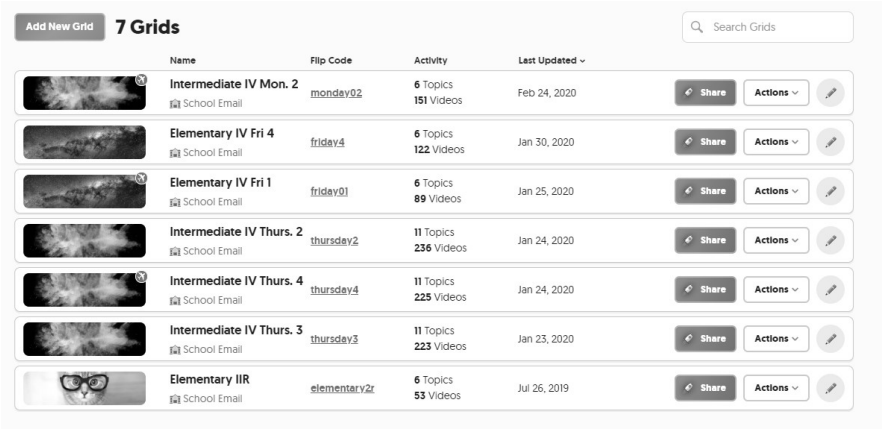

Figure 1. An overview of teachers' Flipgrid grids.

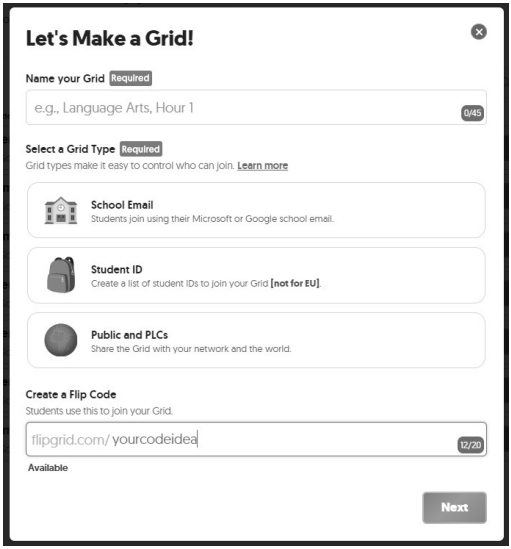

Figure 2. Interface of how to set up a grid on Flipgrid.

Once a grid has been created, teachers have many options for setting up each assignment. Initially, teachers need to create a title for their assignment and a prompt telling the students what the assignment consists of and how to do it. Files, pictures, YouTube or other website links, and videos can be attached to an assignment to use as schemata activation devices (Figure 3). The student's assignment is then to respond to these prompts by creating a video in Flipgrid

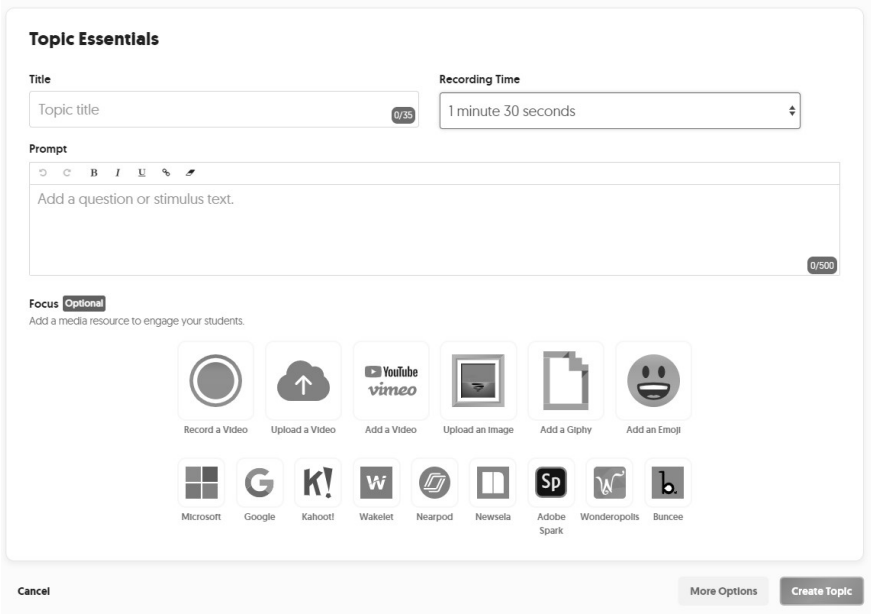

Figure 3. Flipgrid setup page where teachers can choose topics, recording time, prompts, and resources from other websites.

with them speaking. Teachers set a time limit for the student videos, which can range from fifteen seconds to five minutes in length (this has been increased to ten minutes, as of April 2020). For our assignments, we set the length of our videos to five minutes and provided various visual aids, such as comics, photos, cartoons, or GIFs. We also provided questions to prompt spontaneous speaking related to topics that had been covered in class (Figure 4).

After an assignment has been created, teachers can modify its settings in additional ways such as adding deadlines (one day, weeks, months), providing tips and prompts, and enabling student-to-student replies, which is useful for encouraging student interaction. Teachers can choose to provide feedback to student videos either by using a pre-made rubric, or by creating their own custom rubric. We utilized this feature by creating our own rubric with three categories: complexity, time, and details (Appendix). We explained to the students that these grading criteria were not dependent on accurate English, as we wanted them to simply speak in a relaxed manner without planning for up to five

Figure 4. Flipgrid assignment with visual aid (picture) and prompt for students.

minutes. Because most students have been focused on form since they began studying English, this was challenging for them. This rubric was chosen because the criteria helped facilitate spontaneous speech while minimalizing accuracy-based anxieties. We rationalized that as students became accustomed to doing these Flipgrid assignments, they would experience less anxiety.

Finally, other activity settings can be enabled, such as likes, view counts, and video editing, which allow students to personalize their videos and to present themselves to their classmates in their own unique way. Students can personalize their videos by adding stickers, filters, drawings, text, and uploading photos. By giving students options as to how they present themselves to their peers, it provides them with a sense of ownership and encourages them to create videos they will be happy to share with their classmates.

Flipgrid in Use

Over the course of a 15-week semester, 180 second-year university students in eight classes were asked to make a total of five Flipgrid videos each, ranging from three to five minutes in length. The assignment topics were related to units in their class textbooks which were *English Firsthand 1* (Pearson) and *Smart Choice 3* (Oxford) so that they could reuse and strengthen target vocabulary. Students were explicitly told not to prepare a script for each assignment. However, they were allowed to delete and rerecord their videos if they were displeased with them.

These deleted videos were not turned in; only their final videos were uploaded to Flipgrid and assessed. To alleviate concerns regarding privacy, students were given the option of editing their videos to obscure their faces while speaking using emoji stickers, pixilation, or uploaded photos.

In order to prepare students for making Flipgrid videos on their own, various activities were implemented during class time. Students engaged in activities including reviewing and using textbook vocabulary in pair and groupwork, explaining and practicing conjunction use, practicing supporting opinions with three reasons, adding adjectives before nouns, as well as creating mind-maps. Students created videos by downloading the Flipgrid application via the Apple Store or Google Play onto their smartphones (which the majority of our students opted for), or using a PC equipped with a webcam and the Flipgrid website. Instructions for students to create and set up their accounts are in English, the software is free, and only requires an email address. In our experience, students were familiar with downloading and setting up apps on their phones, so there was no difficulty. Students accessed their class grid via URL or QR code shown on a presentation slide in class. Alternatively, if teachers have a learning management system such as Moodle, Blackboard, or Google Classroom, it is easy to keep a link to the class grid there.

Once students have accessed a grid, it is saved on their account, eliminating the need for a URL or QR code in the future, and protecting against accidental data loss. After they have accessed the grid, they are shown a list of clickable assignments (Figure 5). Once they are inside an assignment and have read the prompt material, students press the large green plus sign (Figure 6) which starts the recording process by activating their cameras. After students start recording, there are options to pause or delete videos, activate filters, upload photos, use the back-facing camera, use a whiteboard, and more. When students finish, they can review the video and either submit it or go back and change it.

Teachers graded videos and provided feedback individually, which took some time. Throughout the semester, we watched and graded all student videos from start to finish. Once we had watched a video, we graded it based on our rubric, wrote detailed comments about what students did well in the video and

Figure 5. Student grid interface on Flipgrid.

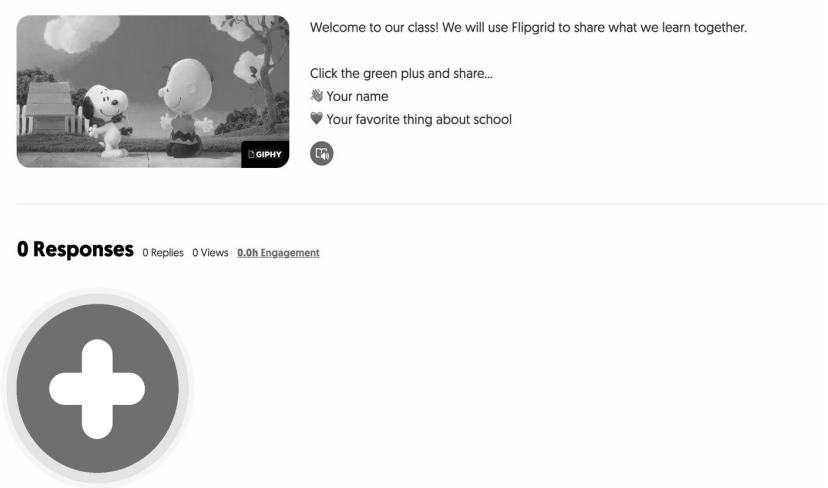

Figure 6. Green plus record button for students to press when they are ready to record their video.

what they needed to improve for their next video, and sent them the feedback via email. This was done for every student video that was turned in for a grade. Students never commented on their feedback; however, if students were taking these assignments seriously, the feedback given could be seen in improvements in subsequent videos. Despite the fact that it is a lot of work to grade and give feedback, teachers will ultimately have to decide for themselves what is best for their contexts.

Advantages of Using Flipgrid

The website and app themselves are free, simple to setup and use, have unlimited storage, require no prior knowledge of coding, and are private and secure. Assignments are highly customizable, as are student videos, which can make them more engaging and personal than mass-produced textbooks. The technical support staff are fast to reply with help and patience, and they are constantly upgrading the website. New features include closed captioning for the hearing impaired, which can then also be downloaded and edited if teachers want students to self-correct or if teachers were interested in doing research on student utterances. It is also possible to create a grid cooperatively with another school. For example, if students were engaged in a study-abroad program, Flipgrid could function as a simple forum for students to ask questions about their host country or current events, share different celebrations, or participate in other cultural exchanges.

In our context, Flipgrid videos were used for spontaneous speaking tasks, which provided much-needed opportunities for fluency practice and development outside of class (Segalowitz, 2010). Fluency development is a major part of Nation's four strands theory (2007), and a lack of fluency development has been linked with slower speech rate, longer pauses, and less automatization of L2. Because students were able to repeatedly make videos until they are satisfied with them, they often practiced a few times before submitting the final version. If tasks are repeated, this repetition will strengthen access to procedural knowledge, and students will be able to access the language faster, which should also improve fluency and fluency development.

As students became accustomed to speaking English more, for some, their anxiety about speaking decreased which facilitated more willingness to communicate. The students who spoke spontaneously improved over the course of the semester not only in fluency but also in confidence. One student said of Flipgrid, "I think Flipgrid especially improve (sic) my English. Flipgrid is hard every time. However, English skills will gradually increase." Another student stated that, "If I used Flipgrid more than now, I learned English's skills and I am good at speaking English." These comments echo the findings of Hashim et

al. (2019), who concluded that using Flipgrid helped learners to develop self-confidence and to combat speaking anxiety.

Another theory underpinning this implementation of Flipgrid was the comprehensible output hypothesis (Swain, 2005), which states that output provides three main affordances: noticing gaps between interlanguage and the target language, testing hypotheses about the target language, and reflecting on and modifying language. Flipgrid allows for more opportunities of output, and because learners can watch themselves when reviewing their videos prior to submission, it creates a unique opportunity to notice their gaps, try out new language, and raise metalinguistic awareness of their language.

Finally, teacher observations suggest that students who completed all of the assignments as intended by attempting to speak spontaneously showed improvements in their speaking abilities with fewer hesitations and pauses and more fluent, spontaneous speech. During group discussions in class, these students were observed to be able to speak in longer sentences and give support for their opinions, to make more eye contact, and generally seemed to be more relaxed and confident. These students were also more willing to raise their hands in class and continually worked well with other students. These are teacher observations, however, and do not represent quantitative data.

Disadvantages of Using Flipgrid

Despite the advantages to implementing Flipgrid for spontaneous speaking, there are disadvantages as well. During the semester, as students continued making their videos, two issues became clear. First, students who obscured their faces often had prepared what they were going to say, and it was not spontaneous speaking. This was evidenced by the sounds of paper rustling, the monotonous way the students were speaking, or by unnatural use of infrequently used vocabulary. This was also the case for some students who did not obscure their faces; some of the students spoke spontaneously while others read aloud. More than half of our students had expressed anxiety about being on video, even after being told they could obscure their faces. Over the course of the semester, some students completed every Flipgrid assignment with no difficulty, some students started

off well then gave up halfway through the semester completing at most half of the assignments, and some students didn't attempt to make videos at all. This might have been due to factors such as a lack of motivation towards English in general, technology anxiety, lack of vocabulary to complete an assignment, or anxiety due to presenting themselves in front of their peers. Students were able to view each other's videos; thus, they might have worried about being seen by their classmates. For example, they might have felt that they would be ridiculed if they could not speak English fluently and clearly and might have simply decided to avoid using Flipgrid altogether to avoid this problem.

Second, students experienced technical issues such as upload failures, accessibility errors, and the inadvertent creation of multiple videos. There is a definite learning curve to using this technology, especially if students are not computer or smartphone literate. Furthermore, the application interface is entirely in English; therefore, students who do not have at least an elementary level foundation of English vocabulary will have difficulties navigating the application. Some of these problems were solved by modeling how to use the app in class, demonstrating each step individually and making a video, having each student make a practice video in class (not as an assignment, simply to say hello and run through the steps of how to upload videos), and having a page on the learning management system with screen shots and directions on how to use Flipgrid.

In addition to drawbacks for students, there are some shortcomings to using Flipgrid for teachers. Watching each video, commenting, and grading them is time-consuming, especially with multiple classes creating multiple videos. For example, if all 180 students each created five videos of five minutes each, this would add up to 75 hours of video. It is possible to speed up the audio; however, teachers can only watch and grade student videos one at a time. This is a major drawback to providing individual feedback, so it is also possible to grade them not on the basis of a rubric, but on the basis of students having submitted videos or not. The problem then becomes quality and length of video.

Lastly, if students are pronouncing words incorrectly, making grammatical mistakes, using vocabulary incorrectly, or are exposed to incorrect L2 in other

ways there is no way to mediate and correct students while they are making videos or edit the video afterwards. It is only possible to delete videos after they have been completed, but if a student deletes and does not rerecord a video, they will not be graded nor will it be seen by the teacher. Teachers can, however, provide direct feedback to students through the grading rubric or email, but this will not change the content of the video. If a student watches a video that uses incorrect L2, they might assume what their classmate said is correct, and there is no way for the teacher to intervene. Because of this, student exposure to incorrect L2 might increase. These are some of the disadvantages that should be considered by teachers before implementing Flipgrid for speaking development.

Although not discussed here, there are other ways to use Flipgrid, which might not target spontaneous speaking practice. Other assignments for spontaneous speaking might include activities such as posting an article and students discuss what they think about it, posting a link to a YouTube video and having students discuss if they think it is real or fake news, or each student tells a scary or funny story and students vote for their number one. More planned speaking practice (such as presentation practice, role plays, telling a riddle, shadowing) might reduce anxiety in a way that spontaneous speaking cannot. Also, allowing students to decide their own topics might reduce anxiety, as the locus of control shifts to learners, and may increase interest.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are both advantages and disadvantages to using Flipgrid, and each teacher will have to decide if it is practical for their specific teaching situation. Flipgrid has numerous potential benefits, such as opportunities for speaking, hypothesis testing of language, repetition, and ease of use. It has the possibility to become a powerful tool to give students the rare opportunity to improve their spontaneous speaking skills outside of class.

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Appendix

Flipgrid Rubric

Each section is worth 5 points for a total of 15 points for the assignment:

Complexity:	Vocabulary usage, multi-word phrases, properly formed sentences, used grammar/language from class, language functions
Details:	Number of reasons given for an answer, adjectives, conjunctions, related to the topic, specific
Time:	5 points (Spoke up to 5 minutes; 1 minute = 1 point).