

[原著論文]

## Is speaking output increased by using the Flipgrid website for homework?

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### 宿題にFlipgridサイトを利用することで、 スピーキングのアウトプットが増えますか？

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#### Abstract

How can we get Japanese university students to give longer answers in spoken English? Longer answers come from being comfortable with using the target language. In this study, first I review some of the previous literature about increasing speaking output. Then, I will report on my own research. Two sections of the same class were taught by the same teacher for both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year university students. The target independent variable was use of the Flipgrid website for oral submissions as well as reviewing other submissions. The working hypothesis is that being able to practice and being able to hear other submissions will lead to students giving longer oral responses during speaking tests. The two test groups used the Flipgrid website throughout the semester, and the two control groups did not. 'Using Flipgrid' means to upload a submission as well as review at least two others for each of 6 assignments. Beginning and end-of-semester oral exams were given to 4 groups of students. The number of words per response for every student were calculated, and the results are presented in this study. I will reflect upon how the results of my study compare with what the previous literature on the topic says, and hope to use the results in future classes.

**Key words:** speaking, output, increase, Flipgrid

キーワード: スピーキング、アウトプット、増やす、Flipgrid

## Introduction

How can we get our students to speak more? Like anyone anywhere in the world, Japanese university students can speak at length in their first language on just about any topic. However, when it comes to speaking at length in English, Japanese students in general seem unable to perform as well as the rest of the world. Why is this?

Is there a basic trouble with learning English itself? In the EF English Proficiency Index, Japanese people ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the level of English, behind Scandinavian countries as well as Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and other Asian countries. Although Japanese people study English for six years in junior high and high school, they have low proficiency. Reasons for the lack of proficiency have been stated as improper emphasis on grammar, and not enough time given to conversations. Schools also place an emphasis on grammatical accuracy. This strive for being grammatically perfect can lead to hesitancy when speaking. Japanese students, in their striving for perfection, would rather remain silent than make a mistake. Another reason for the low level of English is said to be that because Japan is an island nation, there are fewer casual interactions where it is possible to use English. Another commonly listed reason is an inadequate amount of time spent studying the language. Yes, Japanese people study it for 6 years in high school, but in truth they don't have enough contact hours to reasonably reach any real level of proficiency (Tsuboya-Newell, 2017).

Another reason for the inability to perform well might be due to the Japanese personality type. Many Japanese want to be perfect. Other studies have also shown that perfectionism does affect academics in leading to lower performance. In fact, students with tendencies toward perfectionism can be slightly maladjusted and have lower English scores (Matsumura, 2012).

If we look at the overall general view of English Education in Japan, we learn that English lessons are being taught to students starting in elementary school 5<sup>th</sup> grade (Aoki, 2016). However, even with the recent focus on listening comprehension, most instruction centers on grammar and vocabulary (Sasaki, 2008). Sensing a lack of communicative ability among students in general, the Japanese government has put money into many programs such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program, in which the government sponsors native speakers to come and be Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in elementary, junior high, and high school in Japan. However, despite this governmental initiative, students finishing high school still have difficulty with communication in English (Yamauchi, 2009).

At many Japanese universities, educators struggle with a lack of motivation in their students. Especially at science and other non-English major universities, students often have little interest in becoming better English speakers. Any attempt at increasing speaking output is necessarily a product of increasing familiarity (if not ability) with the target language. In order for students to want to increase this, they need to be motivated, either intrinsically or extrinsically. In either case, students' motivation to learn English *can* be enhanced by the teacher integrating technology and media for use in the coursework. As students use these tools to get more comfortable with computers and the internet, they are also motivated to improve how they express themselves (Yamauchi, 2009).

In the world today, everyone has cellphones. University students carry them with them wherever they go. On social media we see people doing clever, crazy, and interesting things all the time. In response to this,

young people are attracted not only to viewing these images, but also to producing them. So if educators can tap into this natural desire to create videos, it could lead to improved performance. Morgan (2013) goes on to say that creating these videos can actually enhance student motivation.

There is no escaping the fact that some students may be shy, or not want to show their faces for other reasons. This could be due to something physical, or it could be a reluctance to capture an emotion with the camera and then share it to the internet. They need not fear this latter problem, because their classmates should not be able to garner any insight into their personalities via this assignment. Indeed it is difficult, if not impossible, to assess anything regarding personalities by examining selfies (Bruno, et al. 2018). It would be helpful for teachers to present this analysis to students prior to the assignment, to help allay their fears.

Selfie-videos are helpful because they can be used either asynchronously or synchronously. Many universities are struggling with corona virus protocols, and juggle having classes meet face to face or online. Having students take selfie-videos, and posting them on a platform such as Flipgrid, which allows classmates to view other classmates' work, actually has multiple benefits. It helps shy students to be able to post equally without the fear of being physically in front of others. Students can re-take the selfie-video as many times as they want until they are completely comfortable with what they've created. Also, taking selfies "can help you cope with stress and, ultimately, make you a happier person" (Walano, 2016).

The main reason for using a software tool such as Flipgrid is that the students will have practice saying the target vocabulary by recording their voice. They will say the target vocabulary a few times in each recording. All vocabulary acquisition research tells us that learners must "meet" new vocabulary many times, over and over, in order to acquire it (Waring & Takaki, 2003). This Flipgrid homework does it in two ways. The first was just talked about, with them recording their voice. Another part of the homework is for them to listen to other students' recordings and to report on what they heard in an email to the instructor. Students doing the recordings, however, often will do extra preparations before pressing the "record" button. They "have an incentive to polish their accent, master good phrases, keep talking, improvise ingeniously and generally perform well" (Pearson, 1990, p. 71). So doing the homework properly should help them achieve the goal of improving their language skills. This is the goal of studying a language, but students may not view this in the same way as they view more traditional homework assignments, and thus may not realize that there can be equal or greater benefits from this style as well.

So the problem for teachers is still *how* to get students to communicate effectively. How to move from merely studying grammar and vocabulary and moving towards effective communication. Pharis points out that students are still interested in learning to communicate in a foreign language. He also says that teachers effectively making use of technology in the classroom are providing support for their students. The support can help students on their journey towards effective communication, and some online projects help students feel more confident in communication (Pharis, 2017).

The research questions the study will examine are as follows.

1. Will using the Flipgrid website regularly lead to an increased number of words spoken in response to questions?
2. Will students get more comfortable with the target vocabulary by using Flipgrid?

## Methods and Materials

### Subjects

This study was conducted at a science university in western Japan, which was home to about 1200 students. Oral Communication is mandatory for first year students, and Advanced Oral Communication is an elective for second year students. In this study, there were 83 control group students and 55 test group students who completed both tests. These students entered the university in the spring of 2020 or 2021. There were other students that did not complete one of the two tests, and were thus excluded from the final findings.

### Methods

Pre-test and post-test. At the start of the semester all the students had to record themselves and send the audio (or video) file to their teacher. All students had the same task, an open-ended question to “introduce yourself and your family.” They could talk as much or as little as they wanted. The topic was familiar, something that they had done many times during their 6 years of junior high and high school English classes. The total number of non-repetitive words that they spoke were recorded (a repetition stutter such as “I, I, I have two parents” is four words, not six).

Next, the test group of students were required to do basically four things. For each unit of the textbook, the test group students needed to record themselves speaking (on topics from the current unit) and post this file to a secure (Flipgrid) website (viewable only by myself and classmates). The tasks differed depending on the vocabulary and grammar for each unit, but each task was located on the Flipgrid website on the class’s private page. In order to post their file to the Flipgrid website, students need to take a selfie, attaching their image and name to the file. After that, they needed to listen to two other classmates’ files, and send their teacher an email reporting on what their classmates said. The test group did this homework ten times.

The control groups had no additional homework assigned to them at all.

At the end of the semester all the students were recorded during their final speaking test. During this test the students were asked to speak on a few randomly chosen topics from throughout the semester. The test-taking time was limited, so every student could not talk about every topic. These were topics that we discussed during the lesson units as well as during the review session, the week prior to the final speaking test. The six main questions that students had to talk about for this final speaking test were the following.

1. Tell me about a time you stayed at a hotel. Talk about the hotel and any other related information.
2. Tell me about a time you were sick. Talk about the sickness and the remedy, and another related information.
3. Tell me about your favorite big city. Include any information you want to.
4. Tell me about your hometown. Include any information you want to.
5. Tell me about your best memory from junior high school.
6. Tell me about your best memory from high school.

All of the questions are open-ended, and students were invited to speak into as much detail as they

desired. Students' responses were recorded and their total number of non-repetitive words spoken were tallied in order to compare with their production at the start of the semester.

## Statistical analysis

A T-test was performed to analyze the data. Two-tailed distribution as well as two sample variance were deemed appropriate for this study.

## Results

A T-test was performed on the initial word count results at the start of the semester to see if there was a difference between the control group and the test group. This number (p\_value) came out to be 0.95142761. So we cannot say that there is a big difference between the groups at the beginning. As we hoped that the two groups would be similar, if not the same, this was a good start. We were able to say that the two groups were similar at the beginning. Also, we can say there was only weak evidence to say that there was any difference between the groups at this point.

When the T-test was performed at the end of the semester to see if there was a difference between the two groups, again there was not a significant difference between the two groups. The number for the T-test after the final speaking test was a p\_value of 0.09884996. This number is much smaller than the 0.95142761 at the beginning. However, this is still too large a number to say that there is any other than weak evidence to suggest a difference between the two groups.

So while there remains the possibility to believe our initial hypothesis about the efficacy of Flipgrid, the statistical analysis doesn't support it. If the T-test had yielded a p\_value of smaller than 0.05, then we could have stated that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. However, the 0.09884996 p\_value cannot be called statistically significant.

The total number of words in each response were also recorded. The average number of words when answering the speaking test at the start of the semester was a bit different between the two groups. The control group average was 42.9 words, and the test group was 43.25

The average number of words when answering the speaking test at the end of the semester between the two groups went a bit in the other direction. For the control group the average number of words was 25.41 and for the test group it was 23.27.

Regarding the numbers of students actually doing the additional Flipgrid homework, of the 55 test group students, 51 of them did the homework. 4 of them never submitted a file to the Flipgrid website. I gave class time to do this, and everyone was "on task," so I think even these 4 did something (recorded themselves without uploading, or listened to other classmates' recordings). Therefore I kept their scores in the test group. There were 10 Flipgrid assignments throughout the semester, and the total number of uploads was 445, for an average of 8.7 each. The total number of emails that I received (the reports on listening to other Flipgrid files) was 358, or 80% of that 445. That is also an average of 7.0 reporting emails from the 51 students. So it could be that not everyone that did the Flipgrid assignment ended up sending me an email (completing the task).

I'm choosing not to include the number of times that each student's Flipgrid upload was listened to. The site does provide this service, but I don't know how reliable it could be. The student that uploaded it could listen to it, or students could listen to only a part, or a few other possibilities. So I am not including those numbers.

## Discussion

As educators, assessment is always at the back of our minds. We always wonder if, and how much, homework the students do. For this project, students were to upload a file to the internet (audio or video), and then listen to (at least) two other students, and then email the teacher directly and report on what they had heard in those other two files. It was easy to see who had uploaded files, and likewise easy to see who sent an email reporting what they listened to. About 80% of those uploading files also did the subsequent listening and follow-up emails. The Flipgrid website posts a counter of how many times each file has been accessed. This is helpful to know that students are actually listening to other students, but it is not completely reliable. This is because we don't know who accesses it (the author?), nor if they listen to each clip in its entirety or only a short portion.

For the pre-test question, I used an open-ended question that all (both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year) students have talked about many times. They were all supposed to, in as much detail as they desired, "tell me about your family." All of the students have spoken about their families, usually regarding a self-introduction, many times during their English classes in both junior high school and high school. Perhaps for this reason, the number of words spoken on average by each student about their families was larger than the number of words that they spoke on the task at the end of the semester.

However, for the end of term measurement, the students got lesson-specific target vocabulary questions. They were again open-ended questions that allowed the students to answer in as much detail as they wished. The questions were about hotels, big cities, sicknesses, hometowns, art, and high school and junior high school memories.

Why did the students speak more on the initial topic than on the ending topic? It could be that the students were more comfortable talking about families than about the textbook topics. They had had to speak on this topic many times over the past six years, whereas they didn't have the long history of talking about the other textbook topics as much. Also, at the beginning, each student sat alone and spoke into their phone. During the speaking test at the end, they were paired with another student. There could be significant apprehension about speaking in front of their peers, including, but not limited to, worries about making mistakes in grammar or pronunciation.

As it is difficult to pinpoint reasons why the test group didn't perform better than the control group, I cannot say that it is a poor choice to use the Flipgrid software. Quite the contrary, as I will continue to use it. As the semester progressed and students became familiar with the process of using Flipgrid, the students could access the assignment more quickly than at the beginning. In fact, instead of taking 20 minutes (as it did at the start of the term), most could access the assignment within 3 minutes by the end of the semester.

King also says that it is up to the teacher's judgement when deciding which new technologies to use and which to discard. We have to take into account many factors (ease of use, student enjoyment, student participation percentage, etc.) before abandoning some technology. King says that "we learn more from our

mistakes than from our successes, and that if a tool does not fit with our Teaching Philosophy, then we should not use it” (King, 2011). I have used Flipgrid in the past with great success, and am not quite ready to abandon it at this time.

Certainly it would have been better to have had the students end with an identical task to the start. Instead of the teacher recording all of their answers during a pair speaking task, the students could have been tasked with recording and sending these files to their teacher on their own time. Undoubtedly some students were shy and hesitant to speak in front of their peers and/or their teacher. For the initial recording, the students could redo it if they weren't satisfied with the initial effort. At the end of semester, using the in-class speaking test recording, the level of student anxiety was surely higher, thus leading to shorter answers. They also only had “one take” to get their answer correct. They couldn't re-do anything.

In the future, it might be worthwhile to survey the students as to how the process of using Flipgrid was for them. This could include questions such as “How easy was it to complete the Flipgrid homework?” and “How easy was it to access the other files in Flipgrid to listen to them?” They could be asked about problems or hesitancy in sending an email to the teacher to report their findings. They could be asked to rate the homework assignments regarding helpfulness.

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## Appendix

The question for the pre-test was worded as "You have given a self-introduction many times in junior high and high school lessons. Please introduce your family now, and include as much information as you want to."

The weekly homework Flipgrid assignments were usually a combination of reading words from the text and expanding on one word or group of words. Two examples are "Read the list of sicknesses from p.26 in the textbook. Then tell me about a time YOU were sick. First, say your name. then, tell me: 1. When was it? 2. What kind of sickness was it? 3. What was the remedy? 4. How long did it take for you to get better? Hopefully you can use one of the problems from the unit OR something like "influenza." AFTER you record your video, please watch 2 others. Then send me (hudson@rs.socu.ac.jp) an email and tell me 1. your student number, and 2 their names and their sicknesses," and "On page 11, Activity 3C, you had to choose which of those three stories and criminals should receive the harshest punishment. Read ONLY the story you choose, and tell me why you think they should have the worst punishment. AFTER you upload your video, listen to 3 others. Send ME and email (hudson@rs.socu.ac.jp) and tell me their names, and which stories THEY chose to receive the harshest punishments."

There were six post-test questions, to which each student was randomly assigned two to answer. These were

1. Tell me about a time you stayed at a hotel. Tell me about the time and the hotel, going into as much detail as you like.
2. Tell me about a time you were sick. Tell me about the duration, remedy, and as much detail as you like.
3. Tell me about a big city that you've been to. Give as much detail as you like.
4. Tell me about your hometown. Give as much detail as you like.
5. Tell me about your best memory from junior high school.
6. Tell me about your best memory from high school.