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THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TOOL ON DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS OF EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: This article explores the role of digital tools in developing speaking skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The rapid growth of educational technology has changed the landscape of language teaching, providing learners with new opportunities to communicate, collaborate, and practice spoken English. Through digital applications such as Zoom, Flipgrid, Duolingo, and mobile-assisted language learning platforms, learners can engage in authentic communication beyond the classroom. The paper analyzes the pedagogical value of digital tools in enhancing pronunciation, fluency, and confidence, as well as challenges such as technological access and teacher readiness. Findings indicate that integrating digital tools into EFL speaking instruction significantly improves learner motivation, autonomy, and communicative competence.
Keywords: digital tools, EFL learners, speaking skills, language learning technology, communicative competence

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the rapid advancement of digital technology has profoundly transformed the landscape of education, particularly in the field of English language teaching (ELT). As globalization intensifies communication demands, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners are increasingly expected to demonstrate effective oral communication skills in academic, professional, and intercultural contexts. However, developing speaking competence remains one of the most challenging aspects of language learning, especially in traditional classroom environments where exposure to authentic communication is limited. The integration of digital tools—ranging from video conferencing platforms and interactive applications to mobile-assisted learning environments—offers new possibilities for creating dynamic, learner-centered approaches to speaking instruction. These tools allow students to practice English in real or simulated communicative situations, collaborate with peers beyond classroom walls, and receive immediate, personalized feedback. As a result, learners can enhance not only their fluency and accuracy but also their confidence and motivation to use English actively. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of technological adaptability in language education. Many institutions, including those in Uzbekistan, rapidly transitioned to online or blended modes of instruction, revealing both the potential and the challenges of digital integration. While digital tools proved essential for maintaining learning continuity, questions remain regarding their pedagogical effectiveness, sustainability, and role in fostering meaningful speaking practice. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of digital tools on developing speaking skills among EFL learners, focusing on how such technologies can enhance communicative competence, learner autonomy, and classroom interaction. By examining the practical use of tools such as Zoom, Flipgrid, and

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Duolingo in the EFL context, this paper seeks to provide insights into best practices for integrating digital solutions into speaking instruction in higher education.

2. Literature Review

Over the past two decades, a substantial body of research has examined the relationship between digital technology and second language acquisition (SLA), highlighting its transformative potential in promoting communicative competence. The integration of digital tools in English language teaching (ELT) has been found to increase learner engagement, enhance motivation, and expand opportunities for authentic communication (Warschauer, 2013; Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). Digital learning environments provide multimodal input and interactive contexts that encourage learners to use language meaningfully, which aligns with constructivist and communicative language teaching (CLT) principles. According to Warschauer (2013), technology facilitates learner autonomy and broadens access to authentic linguistic resources. Similarly, Reinders and White (2016) argue that digital tools foster self-regulated learning, allowing students to take greater responsibility for their progress. Digital learning tools have been widely studied for their impact on second language acquisition. According to Warschauer (2013), technology promotes learner autonomy and provides access to authentic materials. Similarly, Stockwell and Hubbard (2013) emphasize that digital tools support individualized learning and increase motivation. Speaking skill development requires interaction, feedback, and repetition—elements that can be supported through tools like Zoom, Google Meet, Padlet, and Flipgrid. Research by Reinders (2010) suggests that technology allows learners to record, reflect, and self-evaluate their speech. Furthermore, the use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tools enables students to practice anywhere, anytime (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). In the Uzbek EFL context, digital platforms have played an increasingly important role in bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-life communication. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online speaking activities became a vital part of language education, demonstrating the necessity of digital competence for both teachers and students.

3. Methodology

This article is based on a qualitative descriptive approach. The data were gathered from a group of 30 B1–B2 level EFL learners at the Tashkent State University of Economics. Their levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Over six weeks, students participated in digital speaking tasks using platforms such as Zoom for discussions, Flipgrid for video responses, and Duolingo Speaking Practice for pronunciation exercises. The group consisted of 18 male and 12 female learners aged between 16 and 19. Teacher observations, student feedback, and recorded performances were analyzed to determine improvements in fluency, accuracy, and confidence.

4. Procedure

This study was conducted over a six-week period during the spring semester of 2025. Students engaged on a series of digital speaking tasks integrated into their regular English communication lessons.

Week 1-2: Orientation sessions were held to familiarize students with digital platforms such as Zoom, Flipgrid, and Duolingo Speaking Practice.

Week 3-4: Students completed weekly online speaking activities. Zoom was used for live discussions and debates; Flipgrid allowed asynchronous video responses, and Duolingo was used for pronunciation improvement.

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Week 5-6: All participations participated in collaborative projects (e.g., online interviews and virtual presentations) followed by peer feedback sessions using Padlet and Google classroom. Throughout the study, the teacher-researcher acted as a facilitator, providing guidance and formative feedback while encouraging learner autonomy.

5. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using a triangulation method to improve validity and reliability. Quantitative data from self-assessment questionnaires were processed to identify pattern in learner perceptions and progress. Then qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis. The all collected data were categorized under emerging themes such as "digital engagement", "confidence building", and "fluency improvement." The combination of qualitative and quantitative findings allowed for a holistic understanding of how digital tools affected students' speaking skill development in an EFL context.

6. Findings and Discussion

Quantitative results from the questionnaires showed that 83% of students agreed that digital speaking tasks helped them practice more frequently than in traditional classroom settings. Similarly, 76% reported that they felt more confident speaking English online than face-to-face. These perceptions were confirmed by teacher observations, which recorded an increase in active participation and spontaneous speech production over the six-week program. The analysis of classroom observations, learner reflections, and post-task interviews revealed that the integration of digital tools had a significant and positive effect on the development of EFL learners' speaking skill.

1. Increased Motivation: Students reported higher engagement when using digital tools, especially video-based applications where they could see and hear themselves speak. The reduce anxiety and the ability to control their own pace contributed to greater self-assurance.

2. Improved Fluency and Pronunciation: Regular practice using AI-based feedback in mobile apps helped learners notice and correct their pronunciation errors. Through repeated exposure to audio-visual input and automated pronunciation feedback provided by tools like Duolingo, students were able to identify and self-correct their mispronunciations. The asynchronous nature of Flipgrid allowed learners to record multiple takes of their responses before submitting, which encouraged reflection and gradual improvement in fluency and coherence. These findings align with Reinders (2010), who emphasizes that digital tools create safe spaces for rehearsal and self-monitoring. Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2018) noted that technology-mediated speaking tasks enhance learners' ability to process language more efficiently, resulting in smoother speech delivery.

3. Enhanced Confidence: Speaking online or through recorded video submissions allowed shy students to express themselves more freely. As one participant commented during the interview:

"When I record my speaking on Flipgrid, I can listen to myself and try again. It makes me less afraid to talk in class later." This reflects findings by Blin and Munoz (2020), who argue that digital environments lower affective filters and promote risk-taking in language use. The gamified elements of digital tools-such as progress tracking, badges, and feedback-also sustained motivation, making language learning more engaging and personally rewarding.

4. Collaborative Learning: The study also confirmed that digital collaboration fosters communicative competence. During online debates and group presentations via Zoom, students

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engaged in authentic exchanges requiring negotiation of meaning, turn-taking, and spontaneous language use-key features of real communication. Collaborative projects on Padlet and Google Classroom allowed for peer feedback and co-construction of knowledge, encouraging learners to use English for meaningful interaction rather than mere accuracy. These results support the interactionist view of SLA, which posits that communication and negotiation of meaning are central to language development (Long, 1996). The study demonstrates that digital platforms can effectively replicate these interactional conditions even outside physical classrooms.

However, challenges were also observed:
• Unequal access to technology (especially stable internet connection).
• Limited teacher training in using digital platforms effectively.
• Overreliance on apps without guided feedback can limit linguistic depth. Despite these limitations, digital tools proved to be effective supplementary instruments for speaking skill development when integrated purposefully into the curriculum.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study carry several important pedagogical implications for English language teaching in higher education, particularly within EFL contexts such as Uzbekistan. The integration of digital tools should not be viewed merely as a technological enhancement but as a strategic pedagogical innovation that transforms how speaking skills are taught, practiced, and assessed.

7.1 Blended Learning Integration. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a blended learning model that combines face-to-face speaking activities with digital interaction. Platforms such as Zoom, Flipgrid, and Google Meet can be used for synchronous discussions, role plays, and debates, while asynchronous tasks like video journals, podcasting, and voice reflections can extend speaking practice beyond classroom hours. This hybrid approach increases exposure to authentic communication and allows learners to practice in varied contexts, supporting both fluency and accuracy.

7.2 Promoting Learner Autonomy and Reflection. Digital tools empower learners to take control of their own learning process. Applications such as Duolingo, BBC Learning English, or Speechling enable independent pronunciation and vocabulary practice. Teachers can encourage students to record and review their oral performances using Flipgrid or VoiceThread, promoting self-evaluation and metacognitive awareness. Reflective speaking portfolios can also be introduced, where students document their progress and set individualized goals.

7.3 Enhancing Interaction and Collaboration. One of the most valuable pedagogical outcomes of this study is the recognition that digital environments can foster authentic collaboration. Teachers can organize online speaking projects—such as virtual interviews, panel discussions, or cultural exchange sessions with partner institutions—to simulate real-life communicative scenarios. Peer feedback mechanisms on platforms like Padlet or Google Classroom enhance critical listening and mutual support, encouraging students to learn from each other's linguistic strengths.

7.4 Addressing Teacher Professional Development. The study highlights the necessity for teacher training programs that focus on digital pedagogy and task design. Many educators remain unfamiliar with the interactive and communicative potential of digital tools, limiting

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their effectiveness in promoting oral proficiency. Therefore, continuous professional development workshops should emphasize integrating technology meaningfully rather than superficially, ensuring teachers can align tool use with communicative language teaching (CLT) principles.

7.5 Ensuring Accessibility and Equity. While digital integration enhances learning opportunities, institutions must address technological disparities to ensure equal participation. Providing stable internet access, shared devices, and institutional support systems is crucial, particularly in regional universities. Additionally, adopting low-bandwidth alternatives and offline learning options can help bridge the digital divide.

7.6 Assessment and Feedback. Digital tools also open new pathways for formative assessment. Teachers can employ AI-powered pronunciation analyzers or peer-assessment rubrics for continuous feedback. Recorded oral tasks allow instructors to evaluate progress longitudinally, focusing on measurable gains in fluency, accuracy, and coherence. This approach makes assessment more transparent, learner-centered, and data-informed.

Summary

In summary, the pedagogical implications of this study emphasize that digital tools, when used purposefully, can enrich the teaching and learning of speaking skills by promoting autonomy, collaboration, and continuous reflection. To maximize these benefits, educators must combine technological affordances with sound pedagogy, institutional support, and inclusive access. In addition, they provide opportunities for authentic interaction, individualized feedback, and flexible practice. When combined with sound pedagogy, digital technologies enhance fluency, pronunciation, and communicative confidence. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding learners to use these tools effectively and responsibly. Future research should explore long-term impacts of digital speaking tasks on learner proficiency and motivation in different educational contexts.

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