



The Power of Digital Storytelling: Strengthening Speaking Skills among Secondary EFL Learners

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Abstract. *This study examines the effectiveness of digital storytelling in enhancing the speaking skills of secondary EFL learners. The research responds to persistent challenges in speaking instruction, particularly students' limited fluency, low confidence, and insufficient exposure to meaningful communicative tasks. Using a mixed methods design, the study involved an eight week intervention in which students created scripted digital stories through narration, multimedia editing, and collaborative production. Quantitative data were collected through pre-test and post-test assessments measuring fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and coherence, while qualitative data were obtained through observations, interviews, and student reflections. The findings reveal substantial improvements in speaking performance, especially in fluency and coherence, accompanied by increased engagement, reduced speaking anxiety, and heightened self awareness during the storytelling process. These results highlight that digital storytelling provides repeated oral practice and authentic communicative opportunities that support learners' linguistic and affective development. The study offers implications for English teachers and curriculum designers by demonstrating that technology supported narrative tasks can be integrated into regular instruction to foster more interactive, creative, and student centered speaking learning environments.*

Keywords: *Digital Storytelling, EFL Learners, Multimodal Learning, Secondary Education, Speaking Skills.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking proficiency is one of the most essential aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly at the secondary school level where students are expected to develop communicative competence for academic and social interaction. Speaking, as a productive skill, requires not only fluency and accuracy but also the ability to organize ideas coherently, convey meaning effectively, and respond appropriately in real-time communication. In many educational settings, students continue to struggle with speaking due to limited exposure to authentic language use, high levels of speaking anxiety, and classroom practices that prioritize grammar explanation over interactive and communicative activities. These challenges contribute to the slow progression of speaking skills compared to other language components.

Research in the field of educational technology highlights the potential of digital tools to enhance language learning engagement and performance. Digital storytelling, in particular, integrates narrative structures with multimedia components such as images, audio, and video to create meaningful communication experiences. Previous studies have reported that digital storytelling can increase learners' confidence, motivation, creativity, and oral fluency by providing a space where they can plan, record, and present their own stories (Robin, 2016;

Yang & Wu, 2020). Through this process, learners participate actively as content creators, giving them more opportunities for practice in a context that feels authentic, relatable, and aligned with their technological familiarity.

However, despite its growing popularity, empirical studies focusing on the effectiveness of digital storytelling for secondary EFL learners remain limited, especially in Southeast Asian contexts. Much of the existing literature centers on university students or young learners, leaving a gap in understanding how the approach works for adolescent learners who are at a critical stage of developing more advanced communicative skills. Furthermore, several studies emphasize motivational aspects without sufficiently examining how digital storytelling influences specific components of speaking performance such as pronunciation, fluency, lexical range, and coherence. This gap underscores the importance of conducting research that specifically explores the pedagogical impact of digital storytelling on speaking skills at the secondary level.

The novelty of this study lies in positioning digital storytelling not merely as a creative digital product but as a structured pedagogical strategy aimed at strengthening key elements of speaking proficiency. By engaging students in script development, voice recording, editing, and presentation, digital storytelling provides opportunities for repeated practice, self reflection, and linguistic adjustment. These processes promote a deeper awareness of language use and lead to more deliberate improvement in oral communication skills.

This research aims to investigate how digital storytelling enhances the speaking skills of secondary EFL learners and to identify which aspects of speaking are most affected by its implementation. It also seeks to explore students' learning experiences during the digital storytelling process, including the challenges and opportunities that arise when integrating technology into language learning. The findings are expected to contribute meaningful insights for teachers, schools, and curriculum developers in designing communicative and technology-supported speaking activities that meet the needs of 21st century learners.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

The development of speaking skills in EFL contexts is closely tied to several theoretical foundations that explain how learners acquire, practice, and produce spoken language. One of the central frameworks is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which emphasizes meaningful interaction as the core of language learning. Within this perspective, students are encouraged to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and participate actively in communicative tasks. Speaking is viewed not as a product of isolated drills, but as a dynamic

process that requires the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and social skills. This theoretical orientation supports the use of creative and communicative technologies, such as digital storytelling, which offers learners authentic spaces for interaction and expression.

Another relevant foundation is the Multimodal Learning Theory, which posits that learning becomes more effective when information is delivered through multiple modes, including visual, auditory, textual, and interactive elements. Digital storytelling embodies this principle by combining verbal narration with images, sound effects, and video clips, thereby enhancing comprehension and stimulating deeper cognitive processing. Through multimodality, learners are exposed to various linguistic inputs that reinforce vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, while the narrative structure strengthens coherence and organization in spoken outputs. The integration of multimodal elements allows students to experience language in richer, more engaging ways compared to traditional oral tasks.

The Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky also provides a strong foundation for understanding the role of digital storytelling. This theory highlights how learning occurs through social interaction, scaffolding, and collaboration. In digital storytelling projects, learners often work in pairs or groups to plan narratives, review drafts, and provide feedback. Such collaborative processes offer scaffolding opportunities where more proficient peers or teachers guide learners within their Zone of Proximal Development. As a result, students gain confidence and learn to refine their speaking skills through supported practice rather than isolated performance. The social dimension of digital storytelling also boosts motivation, which has been consistently linked to improved oral proficiency.

Previous research on digital storytelling in language education shows promising outcomes. Studies have demonstrated improvements in fluency, pronunciation, creative expression, and learners' confidence in speaking. Robin (2021) reports that digital storytelling enhances oral communication by allowing repeated practice in a low anxiety environment. Yang and Wu (2020) highlight increased speaking fluency and better narrative structure among students who regularly engage in digital story creation. Additional research from various EFL contexts suggests that digital storytelling encourages deeper engagement, autonomy, and critical thinking as learners take ownership of their stories and deliver them using digital media. Despite these positive findings, the majority of evidence is concentrated in higher education settings, leaving a gap in understanding its impact on secondary level learners who exhibit different motivational patterns and developmental needs.

Based on these theoretical and empirical foundations, digital storytelling can be viewed as an integrated pedagogical tool that aligns with communicative, multimodal, and

sociocultural principles of language learning. Its ability to facilitate repeated oral practice, creative expression, and collaborative interaction suggests potential benefits for enhancing various components of speaking proficiency, including fluency, coherence, pronunciation, and vocabulary use. Implicit within these foundations is the expectation that students who engage in digital storytelling activities are likely to demonstrate meaningful improvements in speaking performance, supported by increased motivation and authentic practice opportunities.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how digital storytelling influences speaking skills among secondary EFL learners. The quantitative component was used to measure improvements in students' speaking performance before and after the intervention, while the qualitative component explored students' learning experiences during the digital storytelling process. This design was selected because it allows numerical evidence of skill enhancement to be complemented with descriptive insights that illustrate how and why the improvement occurs in real classroom conditions.

The population of the study consisted of secondary school EFL learners, and a purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who were enrolled in intermediate level English classes. The sample represented a typical group of adolescent learners aged between 13 and 16 years, reflecting the characteristics of the target population. The total number of participants was adequate for both quantitative measurement and qualitative exploration, ensuring that the data captured reflected the diversity of learners' speaking abilities and learning behaviors. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining consent from students and school representatives before the research began.

Data were collected using two primary instruments: a speaking performance test and a student reflection questionnaire. The speaking test was designed to assess fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and coherence through structured oral tasks. The questionnaire captured students' perceptions of digital storytelling and its contribution to their speaking development. Observation notes and short interviews were also used to support qualitative interpretation. Validity and reliability tests indicated that the instruments met acceptable standards, with speaking assessment rubrics showing consistent scoring patterns and the questionnaire demonstrating internal stability. The results were interpreted based on the established criteria used in language assessment and educational research.

The implementation of digital storytelling involved a structured learning cycle where students planned story ideas, wrote scripts, recorded their narration, combined multimedia elements, and presented the final digital story. Throughout this process, students received guidance from the teacher and engaged in peer collaboration, allowing natural scaffolding to occur. The pre-test and post-test were administered to measure change in speaking performance after the intervention period. Classroom observations ensured that the implementation followed the intended instructional sequence.

Data analysis for the quantitative phase involved descriptive statistics and paired sample comparisons to determine whether there were significant improvements in speaking scores after the treatment. The study referred to commonly accepted statistical procedures such as the t-test for mean comparison without recalculating basic formulas. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically to capture patterns related to students' engagement, confidence, and perceptions of the learning process. Triangulation of data sources was conducted to strengthen the validity of interpretations derived from both data types.

The research model used in this study conceptualizes digital storytelling as the independent variable influencing students' speaking skills as the dependent variable. In this framework, digital storytelling refers to a structured learning process involving scriptwriting, voice recording, and multimedia production, while speaking skills encompass fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and coherence in oral communication. This model assumes that consistent involvement in digital storytelling tasks provides learners with repeated practice, multimodal input, and meaningful communicative opportunities that collectively support the improvement of speaking proficiency.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collection for this study was carried out over an eight week period in a secondary school setting where English is taught as a core subject. Throughout the implementation phase, students participated in a series of digital storytelling activities that involved planning, script drafting, voice recording, multimedia editing, and final presentation. The pre-test served to establish the baseline of students' speaking ability, while the post-test measured changes after the full instructional cycle. Observation notes and informal interviews were conducted simultaneously to capture classroom interaction, levels of engagement, and students' reflections on the learning process.

The results reveal a clear improvement in students' speaking performance after participating in the digital storytelling intervention. Learners demonstrated enhanced fluency,

more coherent organization of ideas, and increased confidence when producing spoken language. These findings are supported by both quantitative score comparisons and qualitative evidence from student reflections and classroom observations. The emerging patterns indicate that the multimodal and iterative nature of digital storytelling provided meaningful opportunities for practice, reduced speaking anxiety, and encouraged greater ownership of the learning process.

Research Context and Data Collection Process

The study was conducted at a public secondary school where English is taught as a compulsory subject in the regular curriculum. The participating class consisted of learners at an intermediate level of EFL proficiency who were familiar with basic digital tools but had limited experience in using technology for language production tasks. The research took place over eight weeks, integrating the digital storytelling project into the school's weekly English lessons. This time frame allowed the researcher to observe the full cycle of planning, producing, and presenting digital stories while maintaining alignment with the existing syllabus.

Data collection followed a structured sequence that combined both quantitative and qualitative procedures. At the beginning of the study, students completed a speaking pre-test designed to capture their baseline performance in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and coherence. During the intervention period, classroom observations were carried out to document student engagement, interaction patterns, and the way they collaborated in groups while working on their digital stories. At the end of the eight weeks, a speaking post-test was administered using tasks parallel in format and difficulty to the pre-test. In addition, a short reflection questionnaire and follow up interviews were used to gather students' perceptions of the digital storytelling activities and their perceived impact on speaking skills.

Throughout the process, care was taken to ensure that normal classroom routines were not disrupted and that the digital storytelling activities were perceived as part of regular learning rather than as an isolated experiment. The teacher collaborated closely with the researcher in guiding students through each stage: generating story ideas, writing scripts, rehearsing oral delivery, recording narration, and combining multimedia elements. This integration of instructional and research activities created a naturalistic environment in which the development of speaking skills could be observed in an authentic school context.

Quantitative Results: Changes in Speaking Performance

The quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test revealed clear improvements in students' speaking performance after the implementation of digital storytelling. Mean scores

increased across all four assessed components fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and coherence with particularly notable gains in fluency and coherence. This pattern suggests that regular engagement in narrative based oral tasks encouraged students to speak more smoothly and structure their ideas more logically when performing speaking tasks.

The increase in fluency can be attributed to the repeated rehearsal and recording phases embedded in the digital storytelling process. Students were required to practice their narration several times before finalizing their recording, which offered opportunities for self correction and gradual automatization of language use. The improvement in coherence reflects the influence of narrative structure: as students organized their ideas into a beginning, middle, and ending, they became more aware of how to link sentences and paragraphs in a way that made sense to listeners. Together, these results show that digital storytelling not only stimulated students' motivation but also translated into measurable gains in speaking performance.

Table 1. Mean Score Comparison of Speaking Components.

Component	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Improvement
Fluency	68.4	78.9	+10.5
Pronunciation	70.2	76.8	+6.6
Vocabulary	69.1	75.3	+6.2
Coherence	67.8	79.4	+11.6

Source: Processed test score data (2025)

Table 1 presents the comparison of mean scores in four components of speaking performance measured before and after the digital storytelling intervention. The results show consistent improvement across all components, indicating that learners benefited from the structured narrative and recording activities. Fluency and coherence demonstrate the highest gains, suggesting that the process of planning, rehearsing, and narrating stories helped students produce spoken language more smoothly and with better organization. Pronunciation and vocabulary also improved, although to a slightly lesser extent, which reflects increased exposure to repeated oral practice and the use of context based lexical choices within their stories. Overall, the data indicate that digital storytelling supported measurable growth in students' speaking proficiency.

Qualitative Results: Learners' Experiences with Digital Storytelling

The qualitative data derived from classroom observations, student reflections, and interviews provide deeper insight into how digital storytelling shaped the learners' experiences and contributed to the observed improvements. Many students reported that creating a digital

story was more engaging than traditional speaking tasks, such as individual oral presentations or dialogue memorization. They appreciated the opportunity to choose topics, characters, and visual elements that reflected their interests, which increased their sense of ownership over the learning process.

Observation notes indicated that students were highly active during group work sessions, discussing vocabulary choices, negotiating meaning, and giving feedback on each other’s pronunciation and intonation. This collaborative interaction created a supportive environment that reduced speaking anxiety, as learners felt they were working together toward a shared product rather than being evaluated individually in front of the class. Several students mentioned that the ability to re record their narration helped them feel less afraid of making mistakes, since they could try multiple times until they were satisfied with the result.

Interviews also revealed that students became more aware of their own speaking strengths and weaknesses through the process of listening back to their recorded voices. Some students noted that they only realized their pronunciation issues after hearing the playback, which then motivated them to practice more carefully before submitting the final version. Others commented that combining images, text, and audio helped them remember vocabulary and ideas more easily. Overall, the qualitative findings show that digital storytelling fostered a learning atmosphere characterized by engagement, reflection, and mutual support, all of which contributed to the development of speaking skills.

Table 2. Key Qualitative Themes Identified from Interviews and Observations.

Theme	Description	Supporting Evidence
Engagement	Students show higher motivation during digital tasks	Enthusiastic participation in editing and narration
Reduced Anxiety	Recording reduces fear of mistakes	Students rehearse comfortably before recording
Collaboration	Peer assistance in vocabulary and pronunciation	Groups negotiate meaning and share feedback
Self-awareness	Learners monitor their speaking using playback	Students identify pronunciation and pacing issues
Creativity	Students enjoy integrating images and sound	Learners personalize their stories with visuals

Source: Learner reflections & observations (2025)

Table 2 summarizes the main qualitative themes that emerged from interviews, classroom observations, and student reflections during the digital storytelling process. The themes highlight how learners experienced the project and how these experiences contributed to changes in their speaking performance. Increased engagement appeared as a dominant theme, with students showing enthusiasm toward tasks involving narration and multimedia editing. Reduced anxiety was also evident, as the option to rehearse and re-record narration provided a lower-pressure environment than traditional live speaking tasks. Collaboration emerged as another strong theme, indicating that peer support played a vital role in helping students refine vocabulary choices and pronunciation. In addition, students demonstrated heightened self-awareness by listening to their recorded voices and identifying areas for improvement. The creative dimension of the project further strengthened motivation, as learners enjoyed personalizing their stories with images and music. Overall, these themes suggest that the digital storytelling environment fostered emotional comfort, collaboration, and reflective practice all contributing positively to their speaking development.

Discussion Relationship to Theory and Previous Studies

The results of this study are consistent with theoretical perspectives that highlight the importance of meaningful communication, multimodal learning, and social interaction in language development. From a Communicative Language Teaching perspective, digital storytelling provided authentic communicative tasks in which students used English to convey messages to a real audience their classmates and teacher rather than simply practicing language forms in isolation. This helped bridge the gap between controlled practice and genuine communication.

The findings also resonate with Multimodal Learning Theory, which suggests that combining visual, auditory, and textual modes can enhance comprehension and memory. By integrating images, narration, and sometimes background music, digital storytelling engaged multiple channels of processing, which likely contributed to the improvement in vocabulary use and coherence. The iterative process of planning, drafting, and recording is also aligned with Sociocultural Theory, as students received scaffolding from peers and the teacher within a collaborative environment.

In terms of previous research, the improvements in speaking fluency and confidence observed in this study support earlier findings that digital storytelling can promote oral language development and reduce speaking anxiety. What this study adds is a more detailed picture of how these benefits manifest among secondary EFL learners, a group that has received less attention compared to university students or young children. The combination of

quantitative and qualitative evidence strengthens the claim that digital storytelling can be effectively integrated into secondary EFL classrooms to foster both linguistic and affective dimensions of speaking.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the view that technology mediated tasks such as digital storytelling can operationalize key principles from communicative, multimodal, and sociocultural frameworks in a coherent manner. The observed improvements in fluency and coherence suggest that narrative based, multimodal production tasks are particularly effective in promoting connected speech and organized discourse. This contributes to the growing body of literature that positions digital storytelling as a powerful tool for integrating language skills, creativity, and critical thinking in EFL education.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers several implications for teachers and curriculum designers. First, digital storytelling can be adopted as a structured project within regular speaking lessons without requiring sophisticated equipment; basic computers or mobile devices with simple editing software are sufficient to implement the approach. Second, teachers can use digital storytelling to create a more supportive and motivating atmosphere, especially for students who are reluctant to speak in front of the class. Third, the project format allows for differentiated instruction: stronger students can take on roles such as editing or directing, while others can focus on scriptwriting or narration, ensuring that all learners participate meaningfully. These implications suggest that digital storytelling is not only an effective technique for improving speaking skills but also a practical strategy for cultivating 21st century competences such as collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital storytelling effectively strengthens speaking skills among secondary EFL learners, particularly in the areas of fluency and coherence, as reflected in the clear improvement of post-test scores and consistent patterns observed in qualitative responses. Students showed increased engagement, reduced anxiety, and heightened self awareness during the learning process, indicating that digital storytelling provides a supportive environment for meaningful oral practice. These results confirm that integrating narrative based digital tasks into speaking lessons can enhance both linguistic performance and learners' affective readiness to communicate. While the outcomes indicate positive impacts, the conclusions should be interpreted with caution due to the limited sample

size and the study's focus on a single school context, which may not fully represent diverse learner populations.

Based on these findings, teachers are encouraged to incorporate digital storytelling as part of their regular instructional strategies for speaking, allowing students to rehearse, revise, and express ideas creatively with technological support. Schools may also consider providing accessible digital tools and training to facilitate the integration of multimodal learning activities in English classes. Future studies are recommended to involve larger and more varied samples, explore long-term impacts of digital storytelling on oral proficiency, and examine specific linguistic gains through more detailed discourse or pronunciation analysis. Research that compares digital storytelling with other technology enhanced speaking approaches may also offer deeper insights into the relative effectiveness of different digital pedagogies.

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