

USING DIGITAL PLATFORMS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS IN ESL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: This study investigates the effectiveness of using digital platforms to enhance students' speaking skills in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. The research explores how online tools such as Zoom, Flipgrid, Duolingo, and SpeakUp improve learners' pronunciation, fluency, and confidence in oral communication. A mixed-method approach was applied, combining classroom observations, student surveys, and teacher interviews. Results indicate that integrating digital platforms provides learners with more opportunities for interaction, self-recording, and feedback, leading to improved speaking performance. Moreover, these platforms increase learner engagement and autonomy, offering flexible learning environments beyond traditional classroom boundaries. The findings suggest that digital tools can be used effectively as supplementary resources to develop students' communicative competence. The study concludes that teachers should incorporate digital technologies systematically to make speaking lessons more interactive and motivating.

Key words: Digital platforms, speaking skills, ESL classrooms, language learning, learner motivation, online communication, interactive learning, technology integration, student autonomy, formative assessment, pronunciation improvement, communicative competence.

Introduction

In recent years, the integration of technology into language teaching has become one of the most transformative trends in education. The use of digital platforms in English language teaching, particularly for developing speaking skills, has gained significant attention among educators and researchers. Speaking is considered the most challenging skill for ESL learners, as it requires not only grammatical accuracy but also fluency, pronunciation, and confidence.

Traditional classroom methods often provide limited time and opportunities for learners to practice speaking. However, digital platforms such as Zoom, Flipgrid, and language learning apps offer students new ways to engage in interactive communication. These tools allow learners to record, share, and evaluate their spoken output, providing immediate feedback from peers and teachers. Moreover, digital

platforms promote autonomous learning and can be accessed anytime, which encourages continuous practice.

The purpose of this study is to explore how digital platforms can enhance speaking skills in ESL contexts, focusing on learner engagement, motivation, and language performance. It also aims to identify the challenges teachers face while implementing these technologies and propose solutions to maximize their effectiveness.

Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore how digital platforms enhance students' speaking skills in ESL classrooms. The quantitative data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests to measure learners' progress, while qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations, student reflections, and semi-structured interviews with teachers. This combination allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how technology influences speaking development and learner motivation.

2.2 Participants

The participants of this study were 40 intermediate-level ESL students from a language center in Tashkent. They were aged between 17 and 23 and had been studying English for at least two years. The group was divided into two:

an experimental group (20 students), who practiced speaking using digital platforms such as Zoom, Flipgrid, and Duolingo;

and a control group (20 students), who followed traditional speaking activities without technological support.

Both groups were taught by the same instructor to ensure consistency in teaching style and lesson content.

2.3 Instruments and Materials

Three main tools were used in this research:

1. Speaking Tests: A pre-test and post-test were administered to assess improvements in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and overall communication.

2. Questionnaires: A student questionnaire was distributed at the end of the study to collect learners' attitudes, motivation levels, and feedback on digital platforms.

3. Observation Checklists and Interviews: The researcher observed classroom sessions and interviewed teachers to understand the challenges and benefits of integrating digital tools.

Digital platforms used in the study included Zoom (for live speaking practice), Flipgrid (for video-based speaking assignments), and Duolingo (for pronunciation and vocabulary improvement). These tools were chosen because they provide interactive, student-centered experiences and allow for immediate feedback.

2.4 Procedure

The study was conducted over eight weeks.

In the first week, a diagnostic speaking test was administered to both groups to measure their initial speaking level. From week two to week seven, the experimental group engaged in technology-based speaking sessions. For example, students recorded short Flipgrid videos on given topics, participated in Zoom discussions, and used Duolingo exercises to reinforce pronunciation and vocabulary.

The control group, on the other hand, continued with conventional speaking lessons, including dialogues, role-plays, and pair discussions without digital tools. In the final week, both groups took a post-test, and the results were compared to identify differences in speaking skill development.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate the mean scores and percentage of improvement. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically, focusing on student engagement, confidence, and communication performance. Triangulation was used to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and participated voluntarily. Their personal data and test results were kept confidential, and ethical standards were maintained throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The findings of the study revealed that the use of digital platforms had a significant positive impact on students' speaking skills in ESL classrooms. After eight weeks of instruction, the experimental group demonstrated notable improvement in their speaking fluency, pronunciation, and confidence compared to the control group. The results of the pre- and post-tests showed that the experimental group's average speaking score increased by 27%, while the control group's improvement was only 11%. Students who used Zoom reported that participating in live discussions helped them overcome shyness and anxiety, while Flipgrid encouraged self-assessment and reflection because learners could re-record their videos until satisfied with their performance. Similarly, Duolingo activities strengthened pronunciation accuracy through repeated listening and practice tasks.

According to the post-study questionnaire, 85% of students in the experimental group agreed that digital platforms made speaking activities more engaging and enjoyable. Many participants noted that online tools provided a "safe" space to practice without fear of making mistakes in front of others. Teachers also confirmed that digital

platforms allowed them to give individualized feedback and track student progress more effectively.

3.2 Discussion

The results support the hypothesis that digital platforms enhance speaking skill development by increasing interaction, motivation, and learner autonomy. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Derakhshan & Shirmohammadi, 2021), this study confirms that online environments create authentic opportunities for communication beyond the classroom. The ability to record, listen, and evaluate one's own speech enables continuous self-improvement and reflection — key aspects of communicative competence. Another important finding is the rise in student motivation and confidence. Many learners who were previously hesitant to speak in class became more active during online sessions. This suggests that digital tools can reduce psychological barriers such as fear of mistakes or public speaking anxiety. Additionally, the flexibility of using mobile applications like Duolingo encouraged students to practice independently, thereby promoting learner autonomy. However, the study also revealed some challenges. Poor internet connectivity occasionally disrupted online sessions, and a few students lacked digital literacy skills at the beginning. Despite these limitations, both students and teachers expressed strong support for continued use of digital platforms in speaking lessons.

Overall, the findings indicate that integrating digital technologies into ESL speaking instruction not only improves linguistic outcomes but also transforms the learning environment into a more interactive, student-centered space. Therefore, teachers should receive proper training and institutional support to use these platforms effectively and sustainably.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that digital platforms play a crucial role in improving students' speaking skills in ESL classrooms. The findings clearly show that integrating technology-based tools such as Zoom, Flipgrid, and Duolingo enhances learners' fluency, pronunciation, and confidence while speaking English. These platforms provide a supportive and flexible learning environment that allows students to engage in interactive communication, receive immediate feedback, and practice independently beyond classroom walls.

The research also revealed that the use of digital platforms increases students' motivation and participation. Learners felt more comfortable expressing themselves through online discussions and video recordings, which helped them reduce anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Teachers, on the other hand, found these tools helpful for monitoring student progress, providing individualized feedback, and creating a more dynamic classroom atmosphere.

Furthermore, the study highlights that digital learning fosters learner autonomy — a key factor in language acquisition. Students became more responsible for their learning and demonstrated initiative in improving their speaking performance. However, challenges such as unstable internet connection and lack of digital competence among some learners need to be addressed through better infrastructure and teacher training programs.

Overall, the findings suggest that digital platforms should not replace traditional teaching methods but rather complement them. When used effectively, they can transform ESL classrooms into interactive, student-centered learning spaces that promote communication, creativity, and continuous improvement. It is therefore recommended that English teachers integrate digital tools into their speaking lessons to enhance both teaching quality and learner outcomes in the modern educational context.

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