

THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TOOLS IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Abstract

This article investigates the role of digital tools in developing students' speaking skills in English language classes. In modern language education, speaking competence is considered one of the most important indicators of communicative proficiency. However, many students still face difficulties in expressing their ideas fluently, confidently, and accurately in English. These difficulties are often connected with limited classroom time, fear of making mistakes, insufficient exposure to authentic speech, and lack of interactive practice. Digital tools such as language learning applications, online discussion platforms, video conferencing programs, voice recording tools, podcasts, and artificial intelligence-based speaking assistants can create additional opportunities for learners to practice oral communication beyond traditional classroom boundaries. The aim of the article is to analyze how digital tools support the development of fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, listening-response ability, and communicative confidence. The study is based on descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods. The article argues that digital tools are effective only when they are integrated into lessons with clear pedagogical objectives. If digital technologies are used without methodological planning, they may become distracting rather than productive. The findings show that digital tools increase students' motivation, provide repeated speaking practice, support autonomous learning, and help teachers organize more student-centered lessons. At the same time, the article emphasizes several risks, including unequal access to technology, superficial use of applications, overdependence on automatic correction, and insufficient teacher control. The article concludes that digital tools should not replace the teacher but should function as supportive instruments for developing communicative competence.

Keywords: English language teaching, speaking skills, digital tools, communicative competence, language learning, pronunciation, interactive learning, student motivation.

Introduction

In English language teaching, speaking is one of the most complex skills because it requires the simultaneous use of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and sociolinguistic awareness. A student may know many words and grammatical rules, but this knowledge does not automatically lead to effective oral communication. Speaking requires quick thinking, confidence, interaction, and the ability to respond appropriately in real communicative situations. Therefore, the development of speaking skills has become a central issue in modern foreign language education.

Traditional English lessons often provide limited opportunities for oral practice. In many classrooms, the teacher explains grammar, students complete written exercises, and speaking activities are restricted to short dialogues or reading aloud. This approach is not enough for developing real communicative competence. Students need more time to speak, listen, repeat, record, compare, correct, and communicate in meaningful contexts. Digital tools can help solve this

problem by extending speaking practice outside the classroom and creating more interactive learning conditions.

Digital technologies have changed the way students learn foreign languages. Today, learners can listen to native speakers, record their own voice, participate in online discussions, communicate with international peers, and receive instant pronunciation feedback. Such opportunities were limited in the traditional classroom. However, technology itself does not guarantee effective learning. A weak lesson remains weak even if it includes modern applications. The main issue is not whether digital tools are used, but how they are used pedagogically.

The relevance of this topic is connected with the growing demand for communicative English proficiency. In higher education, professional training, tourism, business, medicine, technology, and international cooperation, English speaking competence has practical importance. Students are expected not only to understand texts but also to participate in discussions, give presentations, ask questions, defend opinions, and communicate in academic or professional contexts. Therefore, English teachers must search for effective ways to develop speaking skills.

The aim of this article is to analyze the role of digital tools in improving students' speaking skills in English language classes. The main objectives are to identify the pedagogical advantages of digital tools, examine their influence on fluency and confidence, analyze possible limitations, and propose methodological recommendations for effective classroom integration.

Methods

The article is based on descriptive, analytical, and comparative research methods. The descriptive method is used to explain the main types of digital tools applied in English speaking lessons. The analytical method is used to examine the pedagogical value of these tools in relation to fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary development, and communicative interaction. The comparative method is used to compare traditional speaking practice with technology-supported speaking activities.

The research focuses on several categories of digital tools. The first category includes voice recording tools, which allow students to record, listen to, and improve their speech. The second category includes video conferencing platforms, which support live communication and online speaking practice. The third category includes language learning applications that provide pronunciation tasks, dialogue exercises, and vocabulary practice. The fourth category includes podcasts and video materials that expose students to authentic English speech. The fifth category includes artificial intelligence-based tools that can simulate dialogue and provide feedback.

The study evaluates these tools according to five pedagogical criteria: accessibility, interactivity, feedback quality, contribution to speaking fluency, and suitability for classroom use. These criteria are important because not all digital resources are equally useful. Some tools are attractive but methodologically weak. Others may be simple but highly effective if used regularly and purposefully.

Results

The analysis shows that digital tools can positively influence students' speaking skills in several ways. First, they increase the amount of oral practice. In a traditional classroom, each student may speak only for a few minutes during a lesson, especially if the group is large. Digital tools allow students to continue speaking practice at home by recording answers, preparing audio assignments, participating in online discussions, or practicing with language applications. This repeated exposure is important for fluency development.

Second, digital tools reduce psychological barriers. Many students are afraid of speaking in front of classmates because they do not want to make mistakes. Voice recording tools give them the opportunity to practice privately before presenting their speech publicly. This process helps students notice their own pronunciation, pauses, grammar mistakes, and vocabulary limitations. As a result, they become more confident and better prepared for oral communication.

Third, digital tools improve pronunciation awareness. Applications and online dictionaries with audio pronunciation help students compare their pronunciation with standard models. Some applications provide automatic feedback on pronunciation accuracy. Although such feedback is not always perfect, it can still help learners become more attentive to stress, intonation, and sound production.

Fourth, digital tools support authentic listening and response skills. Speaking cannot develop separately from listening. Podcasts, interviews, video materials, and online conversations expose students to different accents, speech speeds, and communicative contexts. When students listen to authentic speech and respond to it through oral tasks, they develop both comprehension and speaking ability.

Fifth, digital tools increase motivation. Students usually respond positively to interactive and multimedia-based learning. Tasks such as recording short videos, making podcasts, participating in online debates, or preparing digital presentations can make speaking lessons more engaging. However, motivation depends on task design. If the teacher simply tells students to “use an app,” the effect may be weak. Motivation increases when digital activities are connected with clear goals, assessment criteria, and real communication.

At the same time, several problems were identified. The first problem is unequal access to digital devices and stable internet. Not all students have the same technological opportunities. The second problem is distraction. Students may use digital devices for unrelated activities during lessons. The third problem is overdependence on automatic correction. If students rely too much on translation tools or AI-generated answers, their independent speaking ability may not develop properly. The fourth problem is the lack of teacher training. Some teachers use digital tools superficially because they do not have enough methodological preparation.

Discussion

The findings suggest that digital tools can be powerful instruments for developing speaking skills, but their effectiveness depends on pedagogical integration. The teacher must define the purpose of each digital activity. For example, if the aim is pronunciation improvement, students may use voice recording and pronunciation comparison. If the aim is fluency, they may record one-minute speeches without stopping. If the aim is interaction, students may participate in online pair discussions or group debates. If the aim is academic speaking, they may prepare digital presentations and defend their opinions.

One of the strongest advantages of digital tools is the possibility of repeated practice. Speaking fluency develops through regular use, not through passive knowledge. A student who speaks English only during lessons will progress slowly. Digital tools extend the learning environment and make practice more continuous. This is especially important in contexts where students have little contact with English outside the classroom.

However, the teacher’s role remains central. Digital tools cannot replace methodological guidance, correction, encouragement, and assessment. A teacher must select appropriate tools, prepare tasks,

monitor performance, provide feedback, and prevent misuse. Without teacher control, digital tools may become entertainment rather than education.

A practical model for using digital tools in speaking lessons may include three stages. In the pre-speaking stage, students listen to a short audio or video, learn key vocabulary, and prepare ideas. In the while-speaking stage, they record their answers, participate in dialogue, or speak in groups. In the post-speaking stage, they analyze mistakes, receive feedback, and repeat the task with improvement. This model helps connect technology with real pedagogical outcomes.

Another important issue is assessment. Speaking tasks supported by digital tools should be assessed according to clear criteria: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, coherence, and interaction. If students know these criteria in advance, their speaking practice becomes more purposeful. Teachers can also use digital portfolios, where students collect their audio or video recordings over time. This allows both teacher and student to observe progress.

Conclusion

Digital tools play an important role in developing students' speaking skills in English language classes. They provide additional speaking practice, reduce fear of mistakes, improve pronunciation awareness, expose students to authentic language, and increase motivation. Nevertheless, technology is not a solution by itself. Its effectiveness depends on the teacher's methodological competence, task design, feedback system, and classroom management.

The main conclusion is that digital tools should be used as supportive pedagogical instruments, not as replacements for teachers or traditional communication. The most effective approach is a balanced model in which digital resources are connected with communicative goals, regular practice, and clear assessment criteria. For English teachers, the key challenge is not to use more technology, but to use technology more intelligently. Only then can digital tools contribute to the real development of students' speaking competence.

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