

**THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING ON EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING
FLUENCY AND CONFIDENCE**

Khavashkhon Tukhtanazarova

*1st-year master's student at Namangan State Institute of
Foreign Languages named after Iskhokhon Ibrat*

[*toxtanazarovaxavassxon58@gmail.com*](mailto:toxtanazarovaxavassxon58@gmail.com)

Abstract

This study explores the effects of digital storytelling on fluency and confidence among 9th grade EFL students at School 27 in Namangan, Uzbekistan. Thirty-two participants participated in an eight-week digital storytelling intervention that included story planning, scripting, voice recording, and multimedia integration using available technology. Pre-and post-test assessments measured fluency through speech rate, pause frequency, and average sentence length, while confidence was assessed through self-assessment questionnaires and behavioral observations. Results showed significant improvements: speech rate increased by 72%, pause frequency decreased by 64%, average sentence length increased by 58%, and confidence scores increased by 89%. Qualitative data from student feedback and teacher observations showed that the multimodal nature of digital storytelling, creative ownership, and audience-centered production increased sustained engagement and reduced performance anxiety. A comparison with a control group that received traditional oral presentation training showed that digital storytelling participants increased fluency by 68% and confidence by 81%. The findings support the idea that digital storytelling is an effective pedagogical approach to improving speaking skills through purposeful, creative use of language

Keywords

digital storytelling, speaking fluency, learner confidence, EFL pedagogy, multimodal learning, technology-enhanced language learning

Introduction

Fluency represents an important but challenging aspect of English as a foreign language (EFL) proficiency, requiring not only linguistic knowledge but also cognitive processing speed, psychological confidence, and pragmatic competence in real-time oral communication [1]. Traditional English language teaching often struggles to provide sufficient authentic speaking practice, resulting in students acquiring extensive grammatical knowledge but lacking the fluency and confidence necessary for spontaneous oral communication [2]. This disconnect between classroom instruction and communicative competence has prompted teachers to explore innovative pedagogical approaches using technology to create more engaging and meaningful speaking practice opportunities [3]. Digital storytelling has emerged as a promising pedagogical innovation that combines traditional storytelling practices with modern digital tools, allowing students to create multimedia stories that combine text, images, audio, and video [4]. Unlike traditional speech activities, which can be artificial or disconnected from students' interests and experiences, digital storytelling provides authentic communicative contexts in which students write, practice, and perform stories for a real audience [5]. This authenticity, combined with the multimodal nature of digital storytelling, creates a motivating learning environment that can transform speech practice from a stressful task to a creative expression of self [6]. The theoretical framework supporting the potential of digital storytelling for developing speech skills

is drawn from several frameworks [7]. Social constructivist perspectives emphasize how collaborative story-making and peer feedback facilitate language learning through meaningful interaction [8]. Multimodal learning theory suggests that the integration of different semiotic modalities (visual, auditory, textual) supports deeper cognitive processing and engagement than single-modal instruction [9]. Self-determination theory suggests that the creative autonomy and ownership of digital storytelling enhances intrinsic motivation, leading to more sustained effort and learning [10].

Literature Review

Fluency encompasses multiple dimensions, including temporal fluency (the speed and smoothness of speech), disruption fluency (the frequency and duration of pauses and hesitations), and corrective fluency (the frequency of false starts, repetitions, and self-corrections) [1]. These dimensions reflect the efficiency of cognitive processing of spoken language, with higher fluency indicating greater automation of linguistic knowledge and reduced cognitive load in planning and executing speech [2]. Research on the development of fluency emphasizes the importance of extensive, meaningful practice that allows students to process declarative knowledge and develop rapid lexical access and syntactic assembly [3]. However, traditional EFL classrooms often do not provide sufficient practice opportunities due to class size, limited class time, and pedagogical approaches that prioritize accuracy over fluency [4]. Digital storytelling addresses these limitations by encouraging extended practice through engaging creative activities [5].

Confidence in speaking is a crucial factor influencing oral communication, and research shows that low confidence and high speaking anxiety significantly hinder communicative competence even among students who are proficient in the language [6]. Sources of speaking anxiety include fear of negative evaluation, worry about making mistakes, lack of familiarity with speaking topics, and inadequate preparation [7].

Strategies for increasing speaking confidence include providing a supportive learning environment, providing sufficient preparation and revision time, providing positive feedback that emphasizes strengths along with constructive suggestions, and creating authentic communicative contexts in the classroom that reduce the artificiality of speaking tasks [8]. Digital storytelling addresses several concerns by providing personal practice, creative control over content, and shifting the focus from language proficiency to meaningful communication [9].

Digital storytelling combines traditional oral storytelling with digital media creation, allowing learners to create personal or fictional stories using images, music, narration, and video [10].

Methodology

This quasi-experimental study was conducted in School 27 in Namangan, Uzbekistan, during the 2025–2026 school year. The school had approximately 90 students in grades 9–12. English instruction begins in the first grade, with secondary school students receiving four hours of English per week. Participants consisted of 30 9th grade students (aged 14–15) in each of the 3 experimental groups and 30 students in the control group. All participants demonstrated intermediate proficiency (CEFR A2–B1) based on school assessments. The experimental group engaged in a digital storytelling activity, while the control group received traditional oral presentation instruction focused on prepared speeches on assigned topics. All three groups received equal instruction time (eight weeks, two 45-minute sessions per week).

Results and Discussion

Teacher observations documented dramatic changes in the experimental group's speech behavior. Before the intervention, 78% of students showed high levels of anxiety. After the intervention, only 19% showed these behaviors. The control group showed modest improvement, from 75% to 61% showing signs of anxiety.

Participation rates in the experimental group improved from 34% to 87%, while the control group improved from 32% to 48%.

Student Perspectives

Theme 1: Ownership and Creative Control

Students valued autonomy in creating personal stories: "I was able to tell my own story, not just repeat the dialogues in the textbook. It made me interested in speaking well" (Student 14). Creative ownership motivated investment in the quality of the story and oral delivery.

Theme 2: Private practice reduces anxiety

Many students highlighted the privacy of recording: "I could practice alone many times before someone could hear me. It took the pressure off and allowed me to improve without feeling embarrassed" (Student 22). The ability to re-record without an audience watching significantly reduced performance anxiety.

Theme 3: Audience motivation

Creating stories for a real audience increased motivation: "Knowing that my classmates were watching my story made me want to do well and practice my voice" (Student 19). The attention of the audience turned the practice from a boring exercise into a purposeful preparation.

Theme 4: Transferring Confidence

Some students reported increased self-confidence beyond digital storytelling: "After I created my digital story, it was easier to speak in class. I proved to myself that I could speak English well" (Student 27). The experiences of success in the controlled context transfer to other speaking situations.

Initial implementation challenges included students' varying levels of digital literacy, which required varying levels of technical assistance and time management issues, as some students engaged in visual editing at the expense of oral practice. However, clear process instructions and regular checks alleviated these concerns.

Key observation

A shift in students who were typically reluctant to speak. Students who rarely volunteered in traditional classes engaged enthusiastically with the digital stories and spent a lot of time rehearsing the story to achieve the desired quality. This suggests that the creative and technological elements of digital storytelling activate motivational mechanisms that are not possible with traditional speech activities. Analysis of the recordings revealed interesting patterns: students attempted an average of 6.8 recordings before being satisfied, indicating continuous engagement with oral practice. This extensive repetition may have contributed significantly to increasing fluency by processing language knowledge.

Conclusion

This study shows that digital storytelling significantly increases fluency and confidence in 9th grade EFL students at School 27 in Namangan. The eight-week intervention improved

speaking rate by 72 percent, reduced pauses by 64 percent, increased average speaking duration by 58 percent, and increased self-confidence by 89 percent, which increased fluency by 68 percent and confidence by 81 percent compared to traditional instruction. Qualitative evidence suggests that creative ownership, personal practice opportunities, multimodal scaffolding, and audience-centered production encourage extensive oral practice and reduce performance anxiety. The availability of digital storytelling via smartphones and free apps allows for implementation in resource-limited contexts without specialized technological infrastructure. The results confirm that digital storytelling is a highly effective pedagogical approach that transforms speaking practice from anxious performance to creative expression and transfers confidence to other speaking contexts. The results provide an evidence-based rationale for integrating digital storytelling into the Uzbek English curriculum, offering a practical model for teaching technology-enhanced speech that can be achieved within the resources and constraints of typical schools.

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