

## THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING ON EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS

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**Abstract:** The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed contemporary English language teaching and created new opportunities for developing learners' communicative competence. Among technology-enhanced pedagogical approaches, digital storytelling has attracted increasing attention because it combines narration, visual materials, audio, text, and learner-generated content in a meaningful communicative context. This article examines the impact of digital storytelling on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking and listening skills through an integrative review of recent research. Particular attention is given to the ways in which digital storytelling supports speaking fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary development, learner confidence, listening comprehension, engagement, and multimodal understanding. Previous research indicates that digital storytelling can provide learners with opportunities for repeated oral practice, meaningful language production, authentic listening input, and contextualized vocabulary learning. Recent empirical evidence also suggests that digital storytelling may improve both speaking performance and comprehension of authentic spoken English. However, its effectiveness depends on factors such as learners' proficiency level, task design, duration of intervention, teacher preparation, technological accessibility, and the quality of digital materials. The article argues that digital storytelling should not be regarded simply as a technological supplement but as a structured pedagogical approach that can integrate receptive and productive language skills. The study concludes with practical implications for EFL teachers and recommendations for future research.

**Keywords:** digital storytelling, EFL, speaking skills, listening comprehension, communicative competence, digital learning, language teaching

### 1. Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in English has become increasingly important in education, employment, international communication, and academic contexts. Although English language learners are generally expected to develop the four major language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking and listening remain particularly important because they form the basis of oral communication. Nevertheless, many EFL learners experience difficulties in

understanding naturally spoken English and expressing themselves fluently and confidently.

Traditional English language classrooms have often relied heavily on textbooks, teacher explanations, controlled exercises, and prerecorded listening activities. Although these approaches can provide valuable linguistic input, they may not always create sufficient opportunities for meaningful communication. In addition, learners may have limited exposure to authentic spoken English outside the classroom. Consequently, language teachers have increasingly explored technology-enhanced approaches that provide richer and more engaging learning environments.

Digital storytelling (DST) is one such approach. Digital storytelling generally involves the creation or presentation of short narratives through a combination of spoken language, images, photographs, music, animation, text, and video. In language education, it can function both as instructional material and as a learner-centered production task. Recent systematic research indicates that digital storytelling has been associated with language acquisition, learner motivation, autonomy, collaboration, and digital literacy.

The pedagogical value of digital storytelling is particularly relevant to speaking and listening. When learners create their own digital stories, they normally engage in several stages, including topic selection, planning, scripting, vocabulary preparation, rehearsal, recording, editing, and presentation. These stages can provide repeated opportunities for oral production. At the same time, learners who watch or listen to digital stories receive multimodal input in which spoken language is supported by visual and contextual information.

Recent evidence has strengthened interest in this area. A 2024 randomized controlled study involving 89 EFL learners in an IELTS preparation course reported positive effects of digital storytelling on overall speaking performance, including fluency, vocabulary, accuracy, and pronunciation. More recently, a 2026 study conducted with 59 Grade 7 EFL learners found that an eight-week online digital storytelling intervention produced greater improvement in authentic listening comprehension than conventional textbook-based listening instruction.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine how digital storytelling can contribute to the development of EFL learners' speaking and listening skills and to identify the pedagogical conditions that may influence its effectiveness.

### **Research questions**

The article addresses the following research questions:

1. How does digital storytelling contribute to the development of EFL learners' speaking skills?
2. How does digital storytelling support EFL learners' listening comprehension?

3. What pedagogical benefits and challenges are associated with the implementation of digital storytelling in EFL classrooms?

4. What implications does digital storytelling have for contemporary English language teaching?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Digital storytelling in language education

Digital storytelling represents the integration of traditional narrative practices with digital media. Unlike conventional storytelling, digital stories can combine narration with images, video, music, animation, subtitles, and other multimedia elements. This multimodal nature allows learners to encounter language in a richer contextual environment.

A systematic review published in *Education and Information Technologies* examined 71 studies concerning digital storytelling in language learning among adolescents and adults. The review found that a majority of the studies reported positive learning outcomes, although the authors also identified methodological limitations, including insufficient reporting of measurement reliability in some studies.

Similarly, a 2026 systematic review of 21 studies published in *Educational Studies* found that digital storytelling had been used both as instructional material and as a pedagogical approach. The review associated DST with language acquisition, motivation, learner autonomy, collaboration, cognitive awareness, digital literacy, and academic achievement. The authors also noted the potential value of collaborative approaches to digital storytelling.

These findings suggest that DST should be understood not merely as a digital version of traditional storytelling but as a multimodal pedagogical environment in which learners interact with language through multiple channels.



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## 2.2. Digital storytelling and speaking skills

Speaking is a productive skill that requires learners to coordinate vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and meaning-making processes in real time. EFL learners may experience speaking anxiety because they fear making mistakes, lack vocabulary, or have insufficient opportunities to practice.

Digital storytelling can address some of these challenges by allowing learners to prepare and rehearse their oral production before recording it. Unlike spontaneous classroom speaking, a digital story can be planned, edited, and recorded several times. This feature may reduce anxiety and allow learners to focus on accuracy and fluency.

A systematic review of 45 studies found substantial evidence supporting the use of digital storytelling for improving speaking skills across different educational levels. The review emphasized the value of DST as a contemporary instructional method for facilitating communication and oral production.

More recent evidence comes from Bai and Xian (2024), who examined digital storytelling in an IELTS preparation course. Their randomized controlled study involved 89 EFL learners. The researchers reported statistically significant improvements in the experimental group's speaking performance and identified gains in fluency, vocabulary, accuracy, and pronunciation.

The relationship between digital storytelling and speaking can therefore be conceptualized through several mechanisms:

**Planning → Rehearsal → Recording → Feedback → Revision → Oral Performance**

This sequence gives learners multiple opportunities to notice linguistic problems and improve their production. Furthermore, the narrative structure provides learners with a meaningful communicative purpose rather than requiring them to produce isolated sentences.

A 2025 study reviewing secondary research on digital storytelling similarly identified its potential contribution to EFL learners' speaking and writing development, while emphasizing the growing integration of digital technologies into language education.

## 2.3. Digital storytelling and listening skills

Listening comprehension is a complex process involving the recognition of sounds, words, phrases, grammatical structures, discourse organization, and meaning. EFL learners frequently struggle with natural speech because of unfamiliar vocabulary, connected speech, pronunciation differences, speed of delivery, and limited exposure to authentic English.

Digital storytelling can provide contextualized listening input. When learners hear a story accompanied by relevant images, gestures, subtitles, or other visual information, they can use multiple sources of information to construct meaning.

Evidence concerning listening has become particularly significant in recent research. Wang, Zheng, and Zhang (2026) investigated online digital storytelling among 59 Grade 7 EFL learners in Guangzhou, China. The experimental group participated in an eight-week intervention using narrated online stories with captions, visuals, and sound effects. Compared with textbook-based listening activities, the digital storytelling group demonstrated significantly greater improvement in authentic listening comprehension. The study also reported higher behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

Earlier research has also reported positive results. Budianto and Syahrurah investigated digital storytelling in an EFL listening class using a quasi-experimental design with 28 university students and reported improvement in listening performance among students exposed to digital storytelling.

Similarly, research involving 60 EFL students used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design to investigate digital storytelling and listening comprehension. The study incorporated listening tests and observations and reported positive effects associated with the intervention.

These findings indicate that digital storytelling can make listening input more comprehensible by providing contextual and visual support.

### **3. Theoretical foundations**

The potential effectiveness of digital storytelling can be explained through several complementary perspectives.

#### **3.1. Multimodal learning**

Digital stories combine auditory and visual information. Learners can therefore process language through more than one representational channel. Visual information may help learners understand the context of unfamiliar vocabulary or spoken expressions.

However, multimodality should be carefully designed. Excessive animation, music, text, or visual effects may distract learners from the target language. Therefore, multimedia elements should support rather than compete with linguistic input.

#### **3.2. Constructivist learning**

From a constructivist perspective, learning occurs through active engagement and meaning-making. Digital storytelling allows learners to become creators rather than passive recipients of language content. When learners select a topic, organize ideas, create a script, record narration, and revise their work, they actively construct linguistic and communicative knowledge.

#### **3.3. Communicative language teaching**

Digital storytelling is also compatible with communicative language teaching because it provides a meaningful reason for learners to use English. Instead of practicing language exclusively through decontextualized exercises, students use

English to communicate a narrative, express experiences, describe events, or share information.

### 3.4. Sociocultural perspectives

Digital storytelling can involve peer collaboration, teacher feedback, and social interaction. Learners can jointly develop story ideas, review each other's scripts, and discuss pronunciation or vocabulary choices. Such interaction can create opportunities for scaffolding and collaborative learning.

### Conclusion

Digital storytelling represents a promising approach to contemporary EFL instruction because it combines language, narrative, visual communication, and digital media within a meaningful learning environment. The reviewed literature indicates that DST can support the development of speaking and listening skills, particularly by increasing opportunities for oral rehearsal, contextualized language production, authentic listening exposure, and learner engagement.

Evidence concerning speaking suggests that digital storytelling may contribute to fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, and confidence. Recent research involving EFL learners in an IELTS preparation context provides empirical support for improvements in several dimensions of speaking performance.

Evidence concerning listening is also developing rapidly. Recent quasi-experimental research indicates that online digital storytelling can improve comprehension of authentic spoken English and increase behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

Nevertheless, digital storytelling should not be regarded as a universal solution. Its effectiveness depends on instructional design, learner proficiency, intervention duration, teacher competence, technological access, and the quality of multimedia materials. A 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis of oral narrative interventions also found that both traditional and digital storytelling can produce meaningful language-learning benefits, while the magnitude of outcomes varies according to learner proficiency and intervention duration.

Future research should therefore move beyond simply asking whether digital storytelling is effective and investigate **which types of digital storytelling, for which learners, under what conditions, and for how long** produce the strongest learning outcomes. More longitudinal, multi-site, and methodologically rigorous studies are also needed, particularly studies that simultaneously examine speaking and listening development.

Overall, digital storytelling has considerable potential to transform EFL classrooms from environments dominated by language input into spaces where learners actively listen, construct meaning, speak, create, revise, and communicate.

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