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Research Article

Orell Talk for Engineering Communication: Improving Oral Fluency in Information Systems Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the effects of using the educational speaking technology tool, Orell Talk, on enhancing the speaking performance of English as a Foreign Language students. A quasi-experimental research design was employed to compare the speaking performance of EFL students who used Orell Talk with those who learned to speak using conventional methods. The study gathered data through tests, questionnaires, and interviews. The findings revealed that the EFL students who learned speaking skills through Orell Talk demonstrated significantly enhanced performance in fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation compared to the control group. The study concludes that the integration of educational speaking technology tools, such as Orell Talk, can effectively improve the overall speaking proficiency of EFL learners.

Keywords: EFL, speaking performance, educational technology, Orell Talk, AI

INTRODUCTION

Educational technology has become an increasingly integral part of language learning, with a growing body of research demonstrating its potential to enhance various aspects of language proficiency. Technology plays a crucial role in delivering education to students outside of traditional classroom settings(Guzel, 2024). Commendably, teachers have been able to deploy remote learning technologies using a combination of TV, radio, online platforms, and mobile platforms(Iberahim et al., 2023)(Harahap & Kembaren, 2023). The World Bank Group suggests that the use of technologies in education can play a vital role in supporting teachers, students, and the broader learning process, thereby enhancing their effectiveness in their respective subject areas(Technology for Teaching, 2024)(Siti Handayani Harahap & Repelita Waty Kembaren, 2024). This study examines the effects of utilizing educational speaking technology tools, specifically Orell talk, on the speaking performance of English as a Foreign Language students. The advancements in educational technology have made available numerous technology-based tools to enhance students' speaking skills. This has become increasingly important in EFL learning given the growing number of learners seeking to use English freely for communicative purposes(Asratie et al., 2023). Moreover, speaking in a second or foreign language is often regarded as the most challenging of the four language skills(English Language : The Four Skills, 2023). It is well-recognized that this skill is one of the primary English language competencies that students aim to develop. Consequently, it should be accompanied by a multifaceted performance encompassing fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation, all of which students must strive to acquire(Woo & Choi, 2021).

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of integrating speech-enhancing technologies to improve students' oral communication skills. This suggests that a wide range of educational technologies are available to enhance learners' speaking abilities(Ghanizadeh et al., 2015) (Luo, 2023). Educational technologies have gained widespread recognition globally. Similarly, in India, technology has been increasingly utilized to support education, as the integration of technology is a fundamental practice in English as a Second Language instruction(Kundu & Betal, 2023)(Singh & Yunus, 2021). Consequently, the incorporation of technology in learning speaking skills is advocated to enhance students' oral performance(Asratie et al., 2023). However, the English language, which serves as the medium of instruction in India, poses a challenge for both teachers and learners, as it is not their native

tongue(Kumar Dash, 2022)(Pandey & Jha, 2021). To overcome this obstacle, the use of educational technology is sought, as it has the potential to alleviate obstacles related to speaking performance. Numerous scholars have conceptualized speaking performance as the ability to use oral language appropriately and effectively in learning activities across various contexts, both within and outside the classroom(Ho et al., 2023). They have also argued that speaking performance involves speaking rapidly, smoothly, and accurately. Moreover, speaking performance is the characteristic that imbues speech with the qualities of naturalness and normalcy(Herlina, 2023).

Therefore, students' speaking performance can be enhanced through the use of educational speaking technologies, such as Orell Talk. These technologies facilitate the ability to listen to pronunciations of unfamiliar words and phrases. However, The present study investigates the use of Orell Talk to enhance oral communication proficiency among engineering students at a university in India.

INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Conventional teaching approaches have proven ineffective in improving EFL learners' speaking abilities, which necessitate fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and proper pronunciation. Previous research has highlighted the struggles many EFL students face in these aspects of speaking performance, often stemming from fear and limitations(Jaya et al., 2021). Similarly, the researchers in this study have observed EFL engineering students grappling with deficiencies in fluency, coherence, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. To address these shortcomings, the researchers propose integrating educational speaking technology tools that can provide students with practical speaking practice and allow them to learn at their own pace, with the teacher serving as a facilitator rather than the sole source of knowledge(Kheir et al., 2023)(Bu et al., 2021). Leveraging such technology-based speaking tools has the potential to bolster EFL students' overall speaking performance. Educational technology is being utilized to overcome challenges, empowering EFL learners to independently work on learning materials(Wu, 2020). Speaking skills demand the integration of technologies like the Internet, podcasts, video conferencing, and speech recognition software(Derakhshan et al., 2016). However, EFL students and teachers have not widely adopted these technologies, relying instead on conventional materials, leading to challenges such as limited class time and lack of resources. Many students express dissatisfaction with their pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and ability to articulate English sounds due to the absence of educational speaking technology tools. Incorporating appropriate technology-based speaking tools can enhance students' speaking performance by enabling them to practice in a variety of ways(Liu, 2023). This study investigated the effects of utilizing Orell Talk on EFL engineering students' speaking skills.

Despite the existence of previous national and international studies on the use of educational speaking technology, there appears to be a lack of research examining the specific effects of this technology on students' speaking performance. The current study aims to address this research gap by exploring the impact of educational speaking technology, such as Orell Talk, on the speaking skills of EFL students. The study specifically intends to investigate the influence on EFL students' speaking performance in terms of grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and accuracy. Additionally, the study can shed light on the benefits of Orell Talk for teachers and even educational authorities. Moreover, educational institutions must recognize the importance of integrating technology in education, as it can facilitate the teaching-learning process in an engaging and accessible manner, especially given the increasing reliance on technology in academic tasks. Accordingly,

This study investigates the following research question:

1. What influence does the incorporation of the Orell Talk tool have on the speaking proficiency of EFL engineering students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking is considered one of the most important language skills for EFL learners. In this study, speaking performance refers to students' speaking ability and proficiency(Wijaya, 2023). As researchers argued, speaking is a crucial aspect of learners' academic endeavors that they must strive to enhance(Ho et al., 2023). For EFL students, effective speech necessitates fluency, coherence, grammatical accuracy, precise pronunciation, and a rich lexical repertoire(Jon et al., 2022). Accordingly, this study conceptualizes speaking performance as encompassing these key elements: fluency and coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. Fluency and

coherence in speech are the ability to communicate smoothly, without excessive pausing or hesitation, and to connect ideas logically.

Fluent speech flows smoothly with few interruptions, showcasing proficiency in English. Fluency encompasses speech smoothness, rate, utterance length, cohesiveness, and minimal pauses(Anggini & Arjulayana, 2021). Developing fluency remains a challenge for EFL learners, as grammar often takes priority over fluency(Dreßler & O'Brien, 2017). Nonetheless, fluency and coherence are essential for effective speaking performance, involving smooth, logical, and organized speech with appropriate cohesive features. Lexical resources are crucial for speaking performance, referring to the range and accuracy of vocabulary used(Derakhshan et al., 2016)(Wang, 2014).

Robust vocabulary empowers EFL learners to convey their thoughts and ideas more effectively and fluidly. According to researchers, lexical resources comprise a linguistic repository of data on the lexeme within the lexicons of one or more languages (Fuster, 2022). Even students who have learned English from kindergarten through university may struggle with word proficiency (Islam, 2023). Learners often encounter challenges in knowing English words well, hindering their ability to deliver public speeches to audiences (Muhammad et al., 2023). However, researchers argue that students should wield vocabulary with complete flexibility and precision across all topics, utilizing idiomatic language naturally. To overcome this threat, learners should be supported through the use of educational speaking technology tools.

Grammatical range and accuracy are crucial for speaking proficiency. Proper grammar enables EFL learners to communicate effectively(Huang et al., 2022). Accuracy refers to the grammatical acceptability and intelligibility of speech. Accuracy is essential for clear and grammatical speech(Normawati, 2023). This can be achieved by encouraging students to focus on phonology, grammar, and discourse. Research shows non-native speakers exhibit more grammatical errors than natives. Therefore, students should use a full range of grammatical structures appropriately(Tran & Nguyen, 2020). Conventional materials often lack the support of multimedia that could enhance speaking skill development. Relying solely on traditional materials, the instructor becomes the primary source for teaching speaking skills(Patunob & Ibojo, 2023)(Xudoyberganov & Xudoyberganova, 2019).

Pronunciation is a crucial aspect of speaking performance, as it directly impacts the intelligibility and comprehensibility of one's speech. Clear and accurate pronunciation enables effective communication, allowing the listener to understand the speaker's message without significant effort or confusion(Rais et al., 2020)(Pennington & Rogerson-Revell, 2018). Proficient pronunciation involves the proper articulation of individual sounds, stress patterns, and intonation, all of which contribute to the overall clarity and fluency of the spoken language(Mroz, 2018).

ORELL TALK AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

EFL teaching and learning have not yet evolved to provide equal emphasis on all language skills. The majority of university-level English language courses continue to be taught through conventional methods, with limited focus on developing speaking abilities(Chong, 2022)(Al-Mukdad, 2021). As a result, EFL learners often struggle to communicate effectively in English, despite being university students(Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020)(Tipmontree & Asama, 2021). However, recent advancements have led to the introduction of various technologies designed to facilitate the learning of speaking skills within classroom settings(Jon et al., 2022)(Morabit, 2021). Educational technology, such as Orell Talk, has emerged as a promising tool to address the challenges associated with teaching and learning speaking skills in EFL contexts. Orell Talk is an innovative tool that can significantly enhance English speaking abilities. Through its interactive language learning experiences, including extensive speaking practice, it effectively improves users' pronunciation, fluency, and overall communicative competence. By consistently engaging in conversations and honing their skills, learners can steadily develop confidence and proficiency in speaking English.

Orell Talk is a comprehensive digital language lab designed to enhance language learning through interactive and immersive experiences. Orell Talk's interactive learning modules make the educational experience engaging and effective, covering various aspects of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The software's advanced speech recognition technology helps users improve their pronunciation and fluency by providing real-time feedback, a valuable asset for language learners. Orell Talk's AI-powered personalization adapts to each user's proficiency level and learning pace, ensuring that every learner maximizes the benefits of their practice sessions. The platform offers a comprehensive range of course materials catering to diverse languages and proficiency levels, aligning with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Orell Talk provides teachers with tools and resources to track student progress, assign tasks, and offer feedback, streamlining the management and support

of students' learning journeys. The platform's global reach, supporting over 25 languages, makes it a versatile and accessible tool for learners worldwide.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to investigate the impact of utilizing Orell Talk on the speaking performance of EFL engineering students. The researchers utilized a mixed methods approach, involving a pretest and post-test administered to two participant groups. In a quasi-experimental design, two groups of participants are typically utilized, with both groups completing pre- and post-assessments.

Participants

The study recruited 58 first-year engineering students enrolled in a "Communicative English" course at a university in India. The researchers employed a thorough sampling strategy to select the participants, identifying students whose prior educational experiences did not primarily utilize English as the language of instruction.

Instruments

The study employed this data collection instrument:

- A test with pretest and post-test to measure students' speaking performance in areas like fluency, coherence, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The tests were weighted at 36% based on IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors.

Data Collection procedures

First, students were assigned to either a control group or an experimental group, with 29 students in each group. Both groups then completed a pretest consisting of three spoken presentations, which assessed their speaking performance in areas such as fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation.

After the pretest, the intervention phase began. The control group students learned speaking skills using conventional materials, such as the "Communicative English" module. The teacher provided them with various oral activities, including problem-solving scenarios, comparative and contrastive descriptions, debates, and place descriptions, to improve their speaking abilities. This process occurred over two months, with students receiving three hours of speaking instruction per week.

For the experimental group of students, the researchers utilized Orell Talk, an educational technology tool. The teacher oriented the students on how to use Orell Talk to enhance their speaking performance. Students practiced using the tool, listening to pronunciations, and recording their speech for self-evaluation.

After the two-month intervention period, both groups completed a post-test that was identical to the pretest. The control and experimental groups were tested with guided speeches covering topics such as their schools, favorite fields of study, and persuasive speeches.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained through the tests were analyzed using an independent samples T-test facilitated by the SPSS software. This statistical analysis aimed to determine any significant differences in the speaking performance improvements between the control and experimental groups. The performance aspects examined included fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammar, accuracy, and pronunciation, with the groups utilizing either conventional materials or the Orell Talk educational technology tool before and after the intervention.

RESULTS

The findings of this investigation revealed a statistically significant difference in speaking proficiency between the control and experimental groups. The results showcase the participants' enhanced speaking abilities through the utilization of the Orell Talk educational technology. The outcomes of this study are based on a thorough analysis of the data obtained through comprehensive assessments, which provide valuable insights into the efficacy of integrating Orell Talk to improve EFL learners' oral communication skills.

Students Speaking Performance

The analysis of the students' speaking performance involved descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests. The pretest results shown in Table 1 indicate that the experimental and control groups had comparable speaking abilities. While there were minor variations in the means and standard deviations between the two groups, these differences were not statistically significant, suggesting that both groups had similar speaking proficiency before the intervention.

However, the post-test results revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups. Table 1 shows that the experimental group achieved a higher mean score and lower standard deviation compared to the control group, suggesting that the students who used the educational technology tool, Orell Talk, demonstrated enhanced speaking performance after the intervention.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Experimental and Control Groups

Tests	Participants	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Control Group	29	34.85	1.638	0.304
	Experimental Group	29	36.10	1.752	0.325
Post-test	Control Group	29	37.15	2.210	0.410
	Experimental Group	29	46.80	2.465	0.458

Descriptive Statistics for the Control and Experimental Groups

The table presents the results of an independent samples t-test analyzing the differences in speaking proficiency between the control and experimental groups. The analysis tested the assumption of homogeneity of variance using Levene's test, which was not violated (F = 1.553, p = .216). The t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups. When equal variances were assumed, the t-value was 2.145 with 56 degrees of freedom (p = .036), while under the assumption of unequal variances, the t-value remained the same at 2.145, but the degrees of freedom adjusted to 54.432 (p = .037).

The mean difference in performance between the groups was -3.214, with a standard error difference of 0.563 when equal variances were assumed and 0.564 when not assumed. These findings highlight that learners in the experimental group, who utilized educational speaking technology tools, demonstrated significantly higher speaking proficiency scores compared to those in the control group.

Table 2 Independent Samples T-test of Experimental and Control Groups

F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Total Results
Equal variances assumed	1.553	.216	2.145	56	.036	-3.214	38.75
Equal variances not assumed			2.145	54.432	.037	-3.214	38.75

Initially, the students were unfamiliar with the Orell Talk educational technology tool and found it challenging to use effectively. However, as the intervention progressed, the students gradually became more comfortable and skilled in utilizing Orell Talk. By the midpoint of the intervention, the students were actively engaging with the tool to practice their speaking skills, although their proficiency was still developing. Toward the end of the intervention, the teacher observed significant improvements, with most students demonstrating enhanced pronunciation and vocabulary

acquisition through the various features of Orell Talk. The post-intervention results further reinforced the positive outcomes, suggesting that the experimental group students had become proficient in using Orell Talk and had consequently improved their overall speaking performance.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with previous research that has explored the effectiveness of educational technology tools in enhancing EFL students' speaking proficiency (Saed et al., 2021) (Yang & Gamble, 2013)(Jenson & Morrison, 2001). The results indicate that the experimental group, which utilized Orell Talk, showed statistically significant improvements in their speaking performance compared to the control group, which relied on conventional teaching methods. The findings of this study suggest that the implementation of Orell Talk in educational settings is ideal, as it supports both learners and teachers in enhancing the learning experience. The tool helps to make education more accessible, comprehensible, appropriate, and engaging. Additionally, the users of this educational technology must develop a positive perception of its utilization.

The results show that the experimental group students outperformed the control group in speaking performance. Descriptive statistics indicate the experimental group had higher mean scores and lower standard deviations in the post-test compared to the control group. This suggests that using Orell Talk enhanced students' speaking abilities more than the conventional teaching method. Previous research supports this finding, arguing that technology provides language learners with new learning opportunities (Morabit, 2021) (Saed et al., 2021) (Shaji & Nagaraj, 2020).

The findings indicate that using educational speaking technology tools, as Orell Talk, enhanced the experimental group's speaking performance in terms of fluency, coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. In contrast, the control group, who relied on traditional teaching methods, showed less effective speaking skills. The study reveals that educational speaking technologies enable students to practice and improve various aspects of their speaking ability.

While the current study found that students had positive perceptions towards using Orell Talk, other research has suggested that students may have mixed or negative views about educational speaking technology tools. Some studies have reported that students feel these tools are difficult to use, do not adequately address their learning needs, or prefer more traditional teaching methods (Iberahim et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers must consider students' perspectives and provide appropriate training and support to ensure the effective integration of educational speaking technology tools.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the impacts of educational speaking technology tools, as Orell Talk, on EFL engineering students' oral proficiency. The findings revealed that learners who utilized these technologies outshone their counterparts in the control group across key dimensions, including fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation. Moreover, the students held favorable attitudes toward leveraging educational speaking technologies to bolster their speaking skills. Consequently, this study advocates for EFL instructors and curriculum developers to integrate these innovative tools to elevate students' speaking abilities.

Looking ahead, future investigations should explore the effects of a broader range of educational speaking technologies and lengthier intervention periods to further understand how these tools can be leveraged to enhance EFL students' overall speaking performance and proficiency. Specifically, researchers should examine the impacts of a wider variety of digital speaking tools on language learners' fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Additionally, studies with longer duration, such as a semester or academic year, would provide valuable insights into the long-term benefits of utilizing educational speaking technologies in the EFL classroom. Such research can help educators make more informed decisions about integrating innovative technologies to support and improve their students' oral communication skills.

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