

THE IMPACT OF UTILIZING EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY TOOLS ON IMPROVING THE SPEAKING PROFICIENCY OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 18/01/2024	In this study, the efficacy of educational technology tools in enhancing speaking skills was explored through a quasi-experimental design involving 84 IT freshmen. Employing tools such as FORVO (FV), YouGlish (YG), and Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (OALD) 8th edition, the research compared the speaking abilities of students using these technologies (experimental group) against those taught through traditional methods (control group). Data collection encompassed tests, questionnaires, interviews, and instructor logs, with extensive sampling used for student selection. Analysis through an independent samples T-test and thematic analysis revealed that the experimental group showed significant improvements in speaking fluency, coherence, accuracy, vocabulary range, grammatical structure, and pronunciation. Additionally, these students displayed positive attitudes towards using speaking technology tools. These findings suggest the potential of integrating technology in language learning, emphasizing the need for educators and learners to stay updated with technological advancements in this domain.
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ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA VIỆC SỬ DỤNG CÔNG CỤ CÔNG NGHỆ GIÁO DỤC TRONG VIỆC NÂNG CAO KHẢ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 18/01/2024	Trong nghiên cứu này, hiệu quả của các công cụ công nghệ giáo dục trong việc nâng cao kỹ năng nói đã được khám phá thông qua một thiết kế nghiên cứu gần đến thực nghiệm với sự tham gia của 84 sinh viên năm nhất chuyên ngành Công nghệ thông tin. Sử dụng các công cụ như FORVO (FV), YouGlish (YG) và Từ điển Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (OALD) phiên bản thứ 8, nghiên cứu đã so sánh khả năng nói của nhóm sinh viên sử dụng các công cụ này (nhóm thí nghiệm) với nhóm được giảng dạy bằng phương pháp truyền thống (nhóm kiểm soát). Quá trình thu thập dữ liệu bao gồm các bài kiểm tra, các cuộc khảo sát, phỏng vấn và sổ ghi chép của giảng viên, với việc sử dụng một quy trình lựa chọn mẫu kỹ lưỡng cho việc chọn sinh viên. Phân tích thông qua kiểm định T độc lập và phân tích chủ đề đã cho thấy nhóm thí nghiệm đã có những cải thiện đáng kể về nói lưu loát, sự mạch lạc, độ chính xác, phạm vi từ vựng, cấu trúc ngữ pháp và cách phát âm. Ngoài ra, các sinh viên này còn thể hiện thái độ tích cực đối với việc sử dụng các công cụ công nghệ nói. Những kết quả này cho thấy tiềm năng của việc tích hợp các công cụ công nghệ giáo dục trong việc học ngôn ngữ, và nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết cho giảng viên và người học cập nhật với các tiến bộ công nghệ trong lĩnh vực này.
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1. Introduction

In academic discourse, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is broadly defined as a diverse set of technological tools for communication and information management [1]. Adu and Mireku [2] emphasize its role in enhancing educational access and quality. This study, aligning with the views of Stephen and Edwards [3], Dong [4], and Mertala [5], uses terms like "technology" and "ICT" interchangeably, focusing on ICT as technology for information sharing over the Internet, as defined by Sosa & Manzuoli [6].

Technological advancements offer tools to augment students' oral communication proficiency. Dong [4] underscores the importance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, while Lezaraton [7] notes the challenges in communicating in a second language. Students must acquire skills like fluency, coherence, lexical resources, and pronunciation [8]. This study assesses the effectiveness of speaking technologies in enhancing these abilities, focusing on Ethiopia's growing adoption of educational technologies for EFL education. Hong [9] suggests that technology can improve oral performance in EFL contexts, a relevant issue in Ethiopia where English is the primary instructional language.

The study explores the impact of educational speaking technologies like YG, Zoom, FV, and Oxford Advanced Dictionary (8th ed.) in a Vietnamese university context. Speaking performance involves fluency, coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range, correctness, and pronunciation [10]-[12].

Fluency, described by Ochoma [13] and Luoma [14], is the smoothness and continuity in speech. However, achieving fluency in EFL contexts is challenging, often due to an overemphasis on grammatical accuracy [15], [16]. Coherence involves logical speech flow, as supported by Quaid's [17] research. Lexical resource, defined by Higgins [18], is crucial for EFL learners, who often lack proficiency in English vocabulary. Quaid [17] suggests that learners should use vocabulary accurately across subjects.

Nunan [19] defines correctness as adherence to grammatical rules and clear pronunciation. Alaraj [20] found that non-native speakers frequently make grammatical errors. Pronunciation, essential for effective speech, requires proficiency in phonetic sounds and intonation [21]. The study examines these aspects of speaking performance to enhance EFL learners' verbal communication skills.

The integration of ICT into EFL teaching in Vietnam's higher education institutions has become a crucial area of scholarly inquiry, marked by governmental initiatives like the National Foreign Languages 2020 Project and the development of ICT competence standards for teachers [22], [23]. Despite these efforts, Nguyen et al. [24] and Santosa et al. [25] note a gap between the demand for increased ICT utilization in classrooms and the actual competencies of teachers for effective technology integration. This gap affects learners' engagement with technology for language learning and extends beyond the classroom.

Research on ICT integration in Vietnam has primarily focused on broader aspects like the impact of Web 2.0 tools on teacher practices and student engagement [26], [27], and the use of learning management systems such as Moodle and Edmodo [28], [29]. However, these studies have generally addressed ICT integration in a general sense, not specifically exploring the role of particular technological tools in enhancing language skills, especially speaking. This has led to a noticeable research gap concerning the role of specific technological tools in developing speaking skills in EFL contexts [30]. To address this gap, the present study investigates the effectiveness of specific technological tools in enhancing the speaking skills of EFL learners in Vietnam.

Purwanto [31] and others have highlighted the benefits of EST applications like YG, FV, and OALD (8th ed.) in language learning, offering extensive practice and feedback opportunities. By utilizing these tools, students can enhance their pronunciation skills, improve oral proficiency, and develop a wider range of vocabulary [32]-[36]. The YG platform, for example, offers learners the opportunity to listen to authentic pronunciation samples from native speakers, helping them refine their own pronunciation and intonation [31], [32]. Similarly, FV serves as a valuable resource by providing audio recordings of words and phrases pronounced by native

speakers, aiding learners in achieving accurate pronunciation [33], [34]. Furthermore, OALD (8th ed.) offers comprehensive language support, including detailed explanations of grammar structures and usage examples. This resource assists students in developing coherent and accurate language skills [35]. Additionally, the dictionary provides a wide range of vocabulary entries, enabling learners to expand their lexical repertoire [36].

Furthermore, the role of English Speaking Tools (EST) in language education is emphasized as crucial by Higgins [37] and Purwanto [31], serving as supplementary tools in EFL education. Studies by Andreas Andre et al. [38] and Khanh [21] demonstrate that games and ICT, including podcasts and videos, enhance speaking skills [39]. Technologies like YouTube and dictionaries have also been found to significantly improve speaking proficiency and language skills [34], [40].

However, studies on students' perceptions, such as those by Ochoma [13], Yousif & Abeer [41], and Alhaisoni [42], show mixed views on the effectiveness of educational technologies in speaking classes. This highlights a research gap in the Vietnamese context, underscoring the need for further investigation into the impact of EST tools in Vietnam to understand their adaptability in different educational environments.

2. Methodology

This research aimed to assess the impact of EST tools on the speaking proficiency of EFL students at a Vietnamese university, employing a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test evaluations. The study involved 84 first-year IT students, divided into two groups, "intake A" (control) and "intake B" (experimental), selected through comprehensive sampling.

Data were collected using a combination of tests, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and instructor logs. The tests, comprising pre-tests and post-tests, evaluated students' speaking abilities in areas like fluency, coherence, grammatical range, lexical resource, and pronunciation. The pre-test involved guided discussions, while the post-test required oral discussions on predetermined topics, each accounting for 36% of the evaluation, aligned with the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors. The decision to align the evaluation criteria with the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors was based on the IELTS scale's widespread recognition, comprehensive framework, and established reliability. The study ensured that the assessment remained appropriate to the instructional context by evaluating students on the content they had been taught, aligning with the principle of assessing what was covered in instruction.

A questionnaire with 15 closed-ended questions on a Likert scale was used to gather students' perspectives on the effectiveness of EST tools. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with twelve students provided deeper insights into their experiences. The instructor log documented observations during the intervention phase.

The control group, "intake A", engaged in traditional speaking skill methods, while the experimental group, "intake B", used EST tools like YG, FV, and OALD (8th ed.) for two months. Activities included listening to pronunciations, understanding word definitions, and practicing pronunciation. Both groups were taught by the same instructor, and their progress was recorded in a teacher log.

Post-intervention, a post-test identical to the pre-test was administered, and a questionnaire was distributed to assess the perceived effectiveness of EST tools. Data analysis combined quantitative methods, using an independent samples T-test in SPSS version 27 to compare speaking performance improvements, and qualitative methods, analyzing questionnaire responses, interview data, and teacher logs to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of EST tools in enhancing EFL speaking proficiency.

3. Results

3.1. Improvement in students' speaking abilities

The enhancement of students' speaking proficiency was assessed via various evaluation methods, and the gathered data underwent analysis employing both descriptive statistical

measures and an independent samples t-test. Furthermore, qualitative insights derived from instructors' logs were integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the advancements in the students' speaking skills.

The teacher's log provided a detailed analysis of students' speaking performance, focusing on fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range, accuracy, and pronunciation. This analysis showed a gradual improvement due to consistent practice with EST tools like YG, FV, and OALD (8th edition).

Initially, both the experimental and control groups had similar speaking performances in the pre-test, with mean scores of 36.52 (SD = 1.8) and 35.23 (SD = 1.6) respectively. However, post-test results revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group, with their mean score rising to 46.38 (SD = 2.5), compared to the control group's 37.12 (SD = 2.2). The independent samples t-test results ($t(82) = 1.569$, $P < 0.05$, $d = 0.511$) confirmed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, suggesting that the use of speaking technology tools led to superior improvements in speaking performance.

At the intervention's start, the teacher noted the students' unfamiliarity with the technology tools. Most were unaware of the capabilities of platforms like YG, FV, and especially the OALD's pronunciation features. As the intervention progressed, the teacher's log reflected a noticeable increase in students' engagement and proficiency with these tools. By the end, there was a considerable improvement in their pronunciation and vocabulary expansion, as they actively utilized ESTs for language learning. This positive development in their use of technology tools for speaking skills was a key observation documented in the teacher's log.

3.2. Learners' views on EST

This research investigated EFL students' perspectives on using EST to enhance their speaking skills, utilizing a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews for the experimental group. The findings indicated a generally positive attitude towards EST.

Descriptive data highlighted this positive sentiment. Students rated their enjoyment of using EST in speaking classes highly, with a mean score of 4.39 (SD = 0.671). They also believed in the effectiveness of these technologies in improving speaking skills, as shown by a mean score of 4.28 (SD = 0.461). Additionally, there was a clear preference for using EST in speaking activities, with a mean score of 4.28 (SD = 0.601), and a perception that these tools improved their English speaking skills, reflected in a mean score of 4.39 (SD = 0.671).

Moreover, students felt that educational technologies made their speech clearer, with a mean response of 4.59 (SD = 0.601). They also expressed anticipation for the continued integration of educational speaking technologies in future lessons, evidenced by a mean score of 4.45 (SD = 0.601). Overall, the results demonstrated a favorable view among EFL students towards educational speaking technologies in terms of both enjoyment and perceived effectiveness.

The statistics also highlights students' perceptions of the impact of EST on language proficiency. Students reported high mean scores for improvements in fluency (4.64, SD = 0.591), coherence (4.58, SD = 0.602), lexical resources (4.34, SD = 0.580), grammatical proficiency (4.49, SD = 0.603), accuracy (4.35, SD = 0.661), and pronunciation (4.35, SD = 0.661). These scores reflect a strong belief in the effectiveness of educational speaking technologies in enhancing various speaking skills.

Specifically, tools like FV, YG, and OALD were identified as instrumental in language development. FV was noted for improving pronunciation with access to native speaker pronunciations ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.670$), YG for overall speaking abilities ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.580$), and OALD for oral communication skills ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.602$).

Qualitative feedback from interviews further supported these findings. Ten out of twelve students emphasized OALD's role in improving pronunciation, grammar, correctness, and lexical resources. YG and FV were praised for enhancing fluency and coherence. One respondent shared

their improved proficiency in using speech technologies like YG and FV, noting enhanced interaction with native speakers. Another highlighted the opportunity provided by these technologies to develop English language skills locally, aspiring to achieve native-like proficiency for future educational opportunities abroad.

This research delves into the effects of integrating educational technologies in enhancing students' speaking skills in EFL settings. It particularly focuses on students' perceptions of specific technologies such as FV, YG, and the OALD (8th edition). The study reveals that the inclusion of technology in language education is immensely beneficial, as it makes learning more accessible, understandable, adaptable, and engaging for both students and educators. A positive attitude towards these technologies is essential for maximizing their benefits.

Addressing the primary research question about the impact of EST tools on EFL learners' speaking performance, the study found that students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group. This is evident from the post-test descriptive statistics, where the experimental group scored an average of 46.38 (SD = 2.5), compared to the control group's 37.12 (SD = 2.2). This improvement aligns with findings from scholars like Khanh [21], and Sosas [8], who argue that technological support in language learning opens up new opportunities. They suggest that incorporating multimedia elements like videos, images, and audios can significantly enhance the speaking skills of non-native speakers.

The Independent Samples T-test and teacher logs further confirm that students can exceed their speaking capabilities with the help of educational technology tools. The teacher's log specifically notes improvements in fluency, coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation in the experimental group. For instance, the log indicates that students initially struggled with fluent, accurate, and coherent speech before the intervention. However, post-intervention, there was a marked improvement in their speaking proficiency.

The results and teacher logs collectively suggest that the use of educational speaking technologies led to improvements in fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation. The experimental group students, who utilized these technologies, displayed a broader vocabulary range, spoke more fluently and coherently, showed grammatical accuracy, and had significantly better pronunciation compared to their initial performance and to the control group.

In contrast, the control group, which did not use these technologies, showed poorer performance in vocabulary, fluency, coherence, lexical resources, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation in their post-intervention speaking exams. They primarily relied on traditional methods like teacher instruction and printed handouts, which did not yield the same level of improvement as the technological tools.

The study also found that YG and FV stand out due to their interactive and user-friendly interfaces, which engage learners in a more active learning process. Unlike traditional dictionaries, YG incorporates gamified learning experiences, which have been shown to significantly enhance motivation and retention in language learners [31]. This gamification approach encourages regular practice, thereby improving fluency and grammatical structures through repetitive and engaging exercises. Similarly, FV offers contextual learning by providing examples of word usage in real-life conversations, which aids in understanding the practical application of vocabulary and grammar, enhancing speaking fluency and coherence. The OALD (8th ed.), in particular, has been instrumental due to its comprehensive features designed to support advanced language learning. The ability to listen to native speakers' pronunciation and compare it with one's own offers immediate feedback, which is crucial for phonetic improvement and accent reduction [35]. This auditory exposure not only aids in pronunciation but also the assimilation of rhythmic and intonational patterns of the language, contributing to improved fluency and coherence in speech. Moreover, the OALD (8th ed.) extends beyond mere word meanings to include synonyms, antonyms, and sentence patterns, which enrich learners' lexical resources. The inclusion of collocations and common phraseologies aids in understanding the contextual and connotative use of language, thereby enhancing grammatical

accuracy and the ability to construct coherent sentences [36]. The dictionary's emphasis on practical usage, supported by examples from a wide range of sources, ensures that learners are exposed to diverse linguistic structures and styles, further contributing to their speaking and writing versatility. In light of these considerations, the use of YG, FV, and OALD (8th ed.) transcends traditional dictionary usage, offering a multifaceted approach to language learning that addresses various aspects of linguistic proficiency. Their integration into language education can significantly contribute to the development of speaking fluency, coherence, and grammatical structure, as evidenced by the improvements observed in the study participants. The effectiveness of these tools is further supported by existing literature on language acquisition technologies, which emphasizes the importance of interactive and contextual learning in achieving language proficiency [31], [34], [35].

Regarding the second research question on students' perceptions of these educational technologies, the findings indicate a generally positive view. The mean values in the perception section of the study were above 3, suggesting a strong interest in incorporating EST into speaking courses and a belief in its effectiveness. This was corroborated by semi-structured interviews, which further confirmed the positive attitudes towards using tools like YG, FV, and OALD.

However, these findings contrast with those of Yousif & Abeer [41], who reported skepticism among students about the effectiveness of virtual classrooms in identifying spoken errors and the lack of in-person interaction. This discrepancy highlights the varied experiences and perceptions of students in different educational technology environments.

4. Conclusions and implications

This study investigated the effects of using EST tools on the speaking proficiency of EFL students. The results showed that incorporating tools like FV, YG, and the OALD (8th ed.) in speaking lessons significantly enhanced students' speaking skills. These tools helped improve key aspects of speaking proficiency, including fluency, coherence, lexical range, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation.

The experimental group, which used these educational technologies, displayed notable improvements in fluency, coherence, vocabulary breadth, grammatical precision, and pronunciation. In contrast, the control group, which relied on traditional teacher-prepared handouts, did not show similar advancements in speaking skills. This suggests that educational speaking technologies can play an important role in refining students' pronunciation, diction, sentence structure, and overall speaking ability.

Additionally, the study found that students had positive attitudes toward using EST to enhance their speaking skills. Their enthusiasm for these tools indicates their perceived effectiveness in improving speaking abilities. This underscores the importance of integrating EST in EFL speaking sessions to provide students with exposure to native speech patterns and practice opportunities.

EFL teachers are thus encouraged to incorporate these technologies into their teaching, and course material designers should consider these tools when developing resources for speaking courses. EFL learners, too, are advised to use these technologies to improve their speech clarity and comprehension for both native and non-native speakers.

While the study focused on a limited number of educational speaking technologies over an eight-week intervention period, the findings are significant. However, a more diverse range of technologies and a longer intervention period could potentially provide more comprehensive insights. Future research should explore the impact of a broader array of educational speaking technologies on students' speaking proficiency over extended periods.

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