

The Effect of Digital Language Games in Augmenting Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a quasi experimental study. This study compares the effects of using the play method and the conventional method to teach the Malay Language to preschool children. The researchers investigated whether the use of the play method helped to enhance the mastery of Malay vocabulary and interest in the Malay Language among preschool children. The subjects consisted of 100 preschool children from a Tamil-medium, government preschool. The Experimental Group was taught using the play method and the Control Group was taught using the conventional method. The study was conducted over a period of six weeks. The findings of this research indicate that the utilization of the play method significantly enhances the mastery of vocabulary and interest in learning the Malay Language among the pupils.

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The natural preference of youth upon entering college is to experience freedom and explore learning beyond the confines of textbooks. However, many first-year college students, especially those from Tamil medium backgrounds, face significant challenges in developing effective spoken English skills. These difficulties include limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, mother tongue influence, and insufficient exposure to real-time English conversations. This study investigates the effectiveness of Digital Language Learning in enhancing spoken communication skills among first-year college students from both Tamil and English medium backgrounds. Numerous researchers have recognized digital learning as an effective method for improving speaking proficiency. Today, digital tools such as language learning applications, interactive platforms, online courses, virtual and augmented reality environments, and gamified learning systems offer abundant opportunities to strengthen language abilities. When study and play are combined, the learning process often becomes more interactive and engaging. Therefore, this study emphasizes the role of digital language games in fostering communication skills among students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The research involved statistical analysis of data collected from achievement tests. Pre-test and post-test scores were examined to determine gain ratios, and a t-test was conducted to assess the significance of the difference between groups. The results indicate a significant improvement in students' speaking skills, demonstrating mastery-level attainment following the implementation of digital language games.

Keywords: Digital language learning, Speaking skills, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Digital language Games.

INTRODUCTION

Our primary mode of communication is language and it enables us to convey ideas and thoughts clearly to others. Some argue that language distinguishes humans from animals, marking a vital aspect of what makes us human. Among the four language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing), speaking plays a crucial role in interpersonal communication. It is not only essential for expressing ideas, emotions, and feelings but also facilitates meaningful interactions among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In strategy research, terms such as cognitive and metacognitive approaches are commonly discussed. Additionally, strategies addressing learners' emotional and social environments such as self-instruction, self-talk, self-reinforcement, and goal setting also play a significant role. Language learning approaches refer to the practices and activities deliberately designed to help learners acquire and use a language more effectively. Speaking skills can only be developed through active participation and consistent practice, with repetition serving as a foundational principle in skill reinforcement. To foster regular practice among learners, especially in speaking, incorporating digital language games in the classroom offers an engaging and interactive method. This paper looks at how digital games can help first-year college students improve their English speaking skills.

Significance of the study

In the current globalized and competitive academic landscape, effective communication in English has become a fundamental requirement for academic success and professional advancement. However, it is clear that first-year college students, particularly in multilingual contexts, face several persistent challenges in acquiring spoken English proficiency. These include cultural and personal differences, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, incorrect grammar usage, poor accuracy, and mother tongue influence. Social rules and speaking norms vary between cultures, which can confuse learners. The ability to learn a new language also depends on the individual learner's style and background. The study first looks at the reasons behind students' inability to speak and understand English effectively. While learning to speak a second language, students may face challenges in different areas. Many students show a strong interest in speaking English because they admire fluent speakers, even though they themselves are not yet confident or fluent. Some students feel shy speaking in front of others, which lowers their confidence. A major problem is limited vocabulary. Students often repeat the same words due to a lack of exposure to varied vocabulary. Pronunciation also varies among students, mainly because of their regional dialects and accents. Grammar is another common issue. Simply knowing grammar rules does not guarantee fluency. Fluency improves through regular speaking practice. On the other hand, some students have a good vocabulary and clear pronunciation, yet still struggle with self-doubt or uncertainty about language rules. This hesitation becomes a barrier to confident communication. This study, therefore, gains significance by exploring how Digital Language Learning tools can address these challenges.

Objective of the study

The fresh minds are always flexible to learn and develop new language. Students study and learn English language from the primary level to the higher level almost more than 17 years of education. Despite this extensive exposure, many students still struggle to speak English fluently when they reach the college level. This gap between passive knowledge and active communication forms the core concern of the present study. The objective of the present study is to enhance the speaking performance of first-year college students by focusing on key factors such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency by the implementation of digital language games. And also it highlights the importance of Digital Language games in the classroom environment. A group of 50 first-year college students with low English-speaking proficiency was selected using a random sampling method to participate in the study.

METHODOLOGY

A group of 50 students, using a random sampling method, were given training for one hour regularly for forty days. This dedicated speaking practice is significant especially for intermediate learners. Consistent and focused speaking practice yields significantly better outcomes as beginners. Regular training supports them to

overcome their fear and shyness and it helps in the enhancement of Vocabulary building, Pronunciation and Fluency in their language. A tool like rubrics scale gives a clear evident on their improvement.

The study implemented a digital-based methodology aimed at improving the speaking performance of first-year college students through the use of free language learning games. The selected tools were integrated into the curriculum and demonstrated during language lab sessions to ensure students were familiar with their functions and objectives.

‘Kahoot’ was used to conduct vocabulary and pronunciation quizzes in a competitive game format, which increased student motivation and participation. ‘Quizlet’ Live supported speaking practice by enabling students to engage with flashcards and word-matching exercises, thus reinforcing pronunciation and vocabulary retention. In cases where individual participation was limited, ‘Baamboozle’ was introduced to encourage collaboration through team-based speaking games and conversation prompts. Demonstrations of each game were carried out prior to implementation, ensuring that students could navigate the tools with ease. Over the course of the study, a noticeable improvement was observed in students’ confidence, vocabulary usage, and pronunciation accuracy. The interactive nature of these tools created a low-anxiety environment, allowing even reluctant speakers to participate more actively. Post-test evaluations revealed a significant enhancement in fluency, coherence, and overall speaking competence among the participants.

Pre-Test Findings

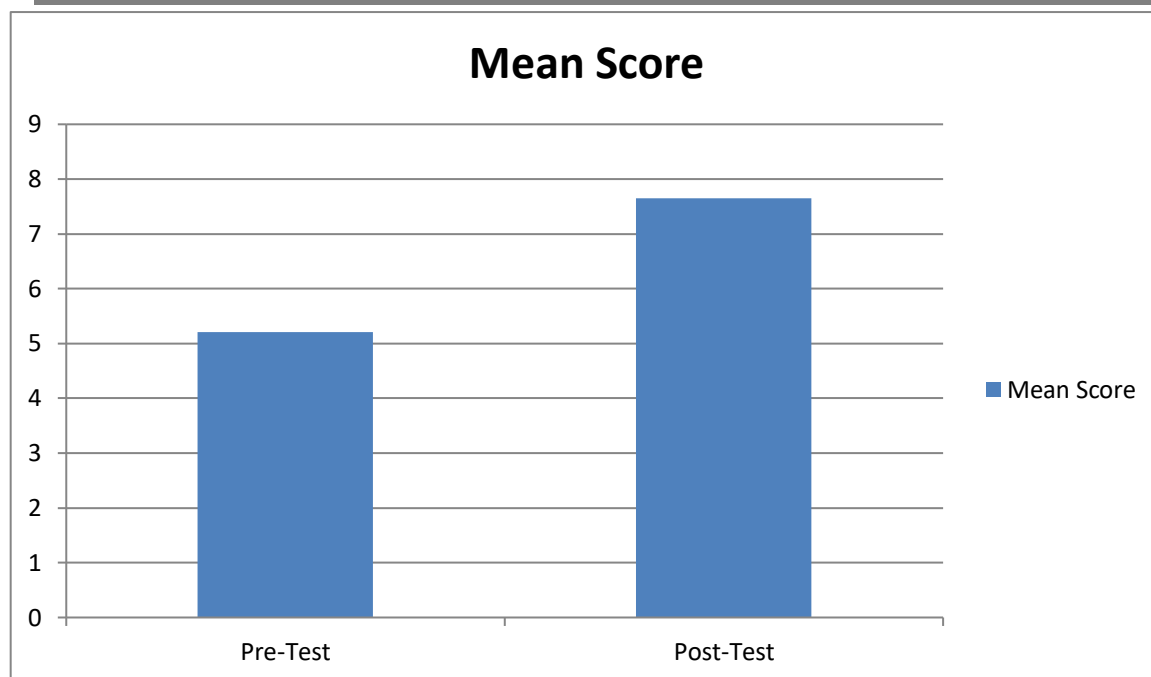
According to the results, 56% of the participants did not perform well on the speaking test, whereas 44% did. Language-related issues (fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), social-related issues (difficulties locating opportunities to learn English and comprehension in speaking class), and affected-related issues (anxiety and self-confidence) were discovered. Speaking issues can be caused by a variety of factors, including a lack of general knowledge, a lack of speaking practice, a fear of making a mistake, a lack of practice with words and grammar, low motivation, low participation, reading laziness, shyness, a lack of dictionary usage, nervousness, fear of criticism, and difficulty pronouncing unfamiliar words.

Post-test findings

For the 56% of students who did not perform well on the pre-test, a targeted intervention using digital language-learning games was introduced to enhance their English speaking skills. Over a period of 40 days, students participated in one-hour sessions dedicated to digital game-based language learning. These sessions were designed not only to address specific linguistic competencies but also to foster an engaging and supportive environment. The digital tools captivated the students’ interest, and even those who were typically hesitant to speak in class became active participants. Notably, the interactive nature of the games helped students focus on the activity rather than on their fear of making mistakes, which significantly reduced their anxiety around speaking English. As the sessions progressed, students unknowingly improved their language skills. They demonstrated increased fluency, expanded vocabulary, and better pronunciation. The games also promoted peer interaction, encouraged spontaneous speech, and built communicative confidence. The overall outcome indicated that digital language games were particularly effective in creating a natural, stress-free environment for language acquisition and speaking practice.

RESULTS FROM DATA ANALYSIS

Test Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Test	5.2167	1.97259	0.36014
Post-Test	7.6500	2.25584	0.41186



Paired Sample Statistics of Pre Test mean is 5.2167 whereas Std. Deviation is 1.97259 and Std. Error mean is .36014. The Post test Mean is 7.6500 and std. Deviation is 2.25584 and the std. error mean is .41186. The Paired sample Test paired difference in the Mean is -2.4333, Std Deviation is 1.04826, Std error Mean is .19139. Confidence Interval of the Difference in Lower level is -2.8248 and upper is -2.0419.

CONCLUSION

The paired sample t-test was employed to analyze students' scores on the pre-test and post-test. Descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the mean were calculated. The results clearly indicate that the Digital Language Game method is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing speaking skills among students. This study involved the development of a game-based literacy curriculum designed to foster both lower-order and higher-order language processes. Furthermore, the research aimed to address previously noted limitations concerning the integration of digital language games and generative platforms, while also expanding the scope of earlier studies by offering new insights and applications in the field of digital language learning.

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