

Enhancing ESL Learners' Oral Narrative Competence through a Digital Reading Tool: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

Oral narrative competence is a crucial factor in language development, fostering social and emotional connections. The integration of Technology-Integrated Language Teaching (TILT) in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction is gaining momentum in developing oral competence, as it can attract and motivate young learners to utilise and use digital tools effectively to enhance their language skills. This study examined the effect of TILT on the oral narrative development of ESL learners using a digital reading tool at The New College, Chennai. A qualitative study, involving 30 intermediate ESL learners, was conducted over four weeks, with participants divided into experimental (n = 15) and control (n = 15) groups from the I Year B.Sc. Chemistry. The experimental group was trained to use Lithium EPUB, a digital tool for reading, engaging, preparing, correcting and narrating. In contrast, the control group completed traditional reading and preparation tasks for oral narration. The qualitative questionnaires were given to test their oral narration skills. The qualitative questionnaires were given to analyse their (i) learning impact in developing their oral narrative skills, (ii) key factors influencing the learners in classroom activities and (iii) feedback on using technological tools in engaging, motivating and developing their oral narrative skills. These findings suggest that digital tools not only enhance student engagement and motivate them to prepare but also provide valuable learning points. This study can be applied in other ESL classes to develop their oral narrative skills.

Keywords: Digital tools, e-learning, ESL Speaking, oral narrative skills, educational practice, reading tool

1.Introduction

Oral narrative competence is beneficial for ESL learners to develop their language skills, acquire effective communication, and share and interpret cultural content in oral stories with social and emotional connections. It is challenging to teach these skills to digital natives of ESL (English as a Second Language) learners in the present scenario. They need to be motivated with the Technology-Integrated Language Teaching (TILT) methods for teaching four macro skills to ESL learners. Kolikant (2010) and Wang et al. (2019) posit that digital natives prefer to receive information instantly. Technology has entered and changed the dimensions of the teaching and learning process in the education sector. This integration is inevitable due to the evolution of digital-native students in the current tech world. In educational settings, the use of technology has become inevitable and unimaginable. Many researchers have been working on these thematic concepts of integrating technology with English language teaching, and according to Pierson (1999), the integration is an important factor for the successful transfer of teachers' pedagogical, technological, and subject-matter expertise to their students. Technology integration is a teaching strategy, according to Woodbridge (2003). Technology is viewed as a useful tool in education today, supporting the process of learning in the digital age (Ahmadi, 2017; Ahmani, 2019), which is quickly flourishing throughout the world (Zhang & Yu, 2021). It is viewed as a useful tool in education today, supporting the learning process in the digital age (Ahmadi, 2017; Ahmani, 2019), which is quickly spreading throughout the world (Zhang & Yu, 2021). A platform like Lithium EPUB Reader, a digital tool, is important for reading and comprehending, which may enhance learning, understanding and the preparation process for ESL learners from diverse cultures who are from Tamil and Urdu backgrounds. If this tool is used with proper training based on research objectives oriented towards select learners, it may be effective. It can be used for the preparation and practice of oral narration successfully.

A well-designed digital reader can do more than display text. For Tamil- and Urdu-background learners, L1/L2 glosses, built-in dictionaries, audio narration, and quick look-ups lower decoding load so attention can move to shaping plots, character voice, and audience engagement. Meta-analytic and review evidence shows that digital reading with targeted supports and personalised glossing improves vocabulary growth and comprehension in L2 contexts, which sets up stronger content for telling and retelling stories aloud (Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2024). Pair that reading work with task-based digital storytelling. Randomised and classroom studies report gains in speaking accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and narrative coherence when learners script, record, and share stories using multimedia tools (Bai & Xian, 2024; Hwang et al., 2016). Layer in automatic speech recognition for immediate, explicit feedback on segmental and suprasegmentals, which a

recent meta-analysis finds yields medium, practically useful improvements in ESL/EFL pronunciation, especially when feedback is explicit (Ngo et al., 2024). Put a digital reader that scaffolds comprehension, plus DST and ASR for practice, to give ESL learners a clean pipeline from input to spoken output, exactly what oral narrative competence needs.

2.Review of Literature

This section reviews research works conducted on technology-integrated language learning, with a special focus on a digital reading tool for ESL learners in enhancing oral narrative skills through digital storytelling and digital reading tools, as well as speaking skills. Ahmed's (2023) study resulted in a significant rise in scores, suggesting that students' fluency had improved. It revealed that students frequently used oral communication, spoke slowly, and relied on fillers, exhibiting hesitancy and fragmented speech. Improved fluency was demonstrated in the post-test after digital storytelling interventions. The benefits of digital storytelling on fluency development were demonstrated by the students' increased oral and speaking speed, decreased hesitation, and improved chronological arrangement of events.

Nair and Yunus (2021) highlighted the potential of digital storytelling (DST) to improve speaking skills through their research using the PRISMA method; a systematic review of 45 studies supported it. The strength of this study is its ability to show how DST is applicable at all educational levels. On the other hand, it is vague about contextual variation, study quality, and selection criteria. Claims of "empirical proof" are not questioned critically, and implementation issues are disregarded. Although encouraging, a more analytical and balanced viewpoint would enhance the review. With an emphasis on written skills and a disregard for speaking and listening, Ong and Aryadoust (2023) found significant gaps in the literature on the effects of DST on children's language acquisition. It highlights a significant problem: most studies (92%) do not have reliability checks, which compromises the validity of the studies. Although it focuses on important methodological errors, it analyses in detail how these factors impact DST's use in the classroom activities. This study aims to explore and test more detailed and trustworthy research to back up the use of DST. Khan, Abu Ziden, and Khan (2023) foregrounded the importance of the novelty effect and an emphasis on efficiency over the process system. Their study pointed out that insignificant results were not sufficiently analysed in their systematic review analysis of 33 studies on DST for English-speaking and writing competence. The merits of this review on more contextual factors provided helpful direction for the upcoming DST study and application. The foundations of digital reading and creating tasks related to it are the main focus of this section. Reiber-Kuijpers, Kral, and Meijer (2021) provided a detailed overview of digital reading in SLA contexts in their systematic review study, emphasising important aspects of

digital tasks, environments, and reader profiles. The paper highlighted the cognitive difficulties and motivational advantages of digital reading.

The reviews focused on the complex relationship that exists between the use of digital reading strategies and comprehension outcomes by revealing discrepancies between perceived and actual strategy use. Although it highlights exploratory, qualitative research offers rich insights, there is a legitimate need for more thorough research designs and the inclusion of teachers' perspectives to enhance comprehension and practical application. Overall, the review finds key directions for advancing the field of digital SL reading research. However, implementation issues, such as insufficient teacher preparation, inadequate institutional support, and insufficient funding, restrict the effective use of DST in creating oral narratives. There were many challenges when considering the methodological and implementation stages. Iberahim, Yunus, and Sulaiman (2023) stated the growing role of technology in language instruction and its ability to engage students and support teachers in a range of learning environments in their perceptive analysis of the text. It acknowledges the dual nature of technology's impact, acknowledging both the benefits it provides for enhancing language acquisition and the risks associated with inappropriate use when proper supervision is lacking. The discussion is still fairly general and could benefit from more specific examples or empirical data to strengthen its claims. Additionally, the study would be more beneficial if it covered strategies for reducing the challenges brought on by technology abuse.

According to recent literature reviews, there is a potential gap in improving the oral narrative skills of ESL learners from The New College when digital reading tools and storytelling frameworks are combined. Utilising digital formats has many advantages, including the ability to inspire and engage students, have a profound effect on learning, bridge the gap between speaking and reading, and offer scaffolding for creative expression. The majority of the reviews' studies gauge reading gains rather than narrative oral output. Short-term studies on particular students and goals have been carried out. Longitudinal studies that demonstrate actual advancement in narrative competency are scarce. Students' progress can be tracked for a long time. Scalable implementation strategies, feedback design, and teacher competency are necessary for the effective use of these tools.

3.Method

A qualitative design involving 30 intermediate ESL learners was conducted over four weeks, with participants divided into experimental (n=15) and control (n=15) groups from the I B.Sc. Chemistry. They were selected based on their interest in this research, and the study was initiated after informing them about the research process and obtaining their consent. The experimental group used Lithium EPUB, a digital tool to read, prepare and

narrate, while the control group completed traditional reading and preparing for oral narration tasks. This study was conducted to enhance the oral narrative skills of ESL learners through Technology-Integrated Language Learning. To test its efficacy, ten classroom activities were prepared for one month for the experimental group and implemented in their regular classes using the digital reading tool. Figure 1 describes the flowchart of the methodology.



Figure 1: Flowchart of Methodology

The experimental group received e-texts and read them through a digital tool - Lithium EPUB Reader. After reading it, they narrated it to voice typing in Google Docs. Language correction was tested using the same and then AI-assisted practical sessions on oral narration were conducted, and finally, they gave their oral presentations. The control group were given hard copies of the content, and they were requested to read and give oral presentations traditionally. The following Figure 2 shows the screenshots of Lithium EPUB Reader usage and the training sessions:



Figure 2: Training Sessions

The ten classroom activities were prepared and conducted based on developing the following aspects in oral narrative competence: i) Audience Engagement, ii) Content, iii) Fluency, iv) Pronunciation and v) Lexical Resources. The following research questions were framed to find out their answers:

1. How do digital reading tools impact select learners in developing their oral narrative skills?
2. What are the key factors influencing the learners from the classroom activities?
3. How can technological tools help ESL learners to engage, motivate and develop their oral narrative skills?

4. Results and Analysis

The qualitative questionnaires were given to test their oral narration skills. The qualitative questionnaires were given to analyse their (i) learning impact in developing their oral narrative skills, (ii) key factors influencing the learners in classroom activities and (iii) feedback using technological tools in engaging, motivating and developing their oral narrative skills. The questionnaires were designed to get responses from the participants on developing their oral narration skills, and revealed that they were able to engage their audience while presenting and tailoring content to suit them. The classroom sessions enhanced their fluency in oral narration. They were able to present clearly and audibly with good pronunciation skills. The process of these learning activities supported the preparation for developing their lexical resources based on their chosen story narration. The important findings are shown in Table 1

Table-1
 Summary of Qualitative Analysis

Focus Area	Findings	Observed Impact
Audience Engagement	Learners tailored content to audience needs and maintained attention during oral presentations.	Improved confidence in managing listeners and sustaining interest.
Fluency	Rehearsal through the tool reduced hesitation and reliance on fillers.	Clearer, more continuous speech flow and reduced speaking anxiety.
Pronunciation	Use of voice typing and bilingual support assisted in correcting pronunciation errors.	More accurate articulation and improved phonological awareness.
Lexical Resources	Learners used bilingual translation and dictionary features to enhance vocabulary.	Wider and more context-appropriate vocabulary during narrations.
Content Preparation	Digital reading and structured practice provided clear stages for drafting, correction, and rehearsal.	Greater independence in preparation and reduced reliance on teacher guidance.
Learner Confidence	Regular practice with digital and AI support reduced anxiety before speaking.	Stronger sense of readiness, ownership of tasks, and willingness to present ideas.
Comprehension	With translation and audio features enabled, reading became easier to understand.	Better grasp of story flow and improved narrative organisation.
Motivation	Interactive tool features (reading, listening, and correction) sustained learner interest in tasks.	Increased willingness to participate and enthusiasm for oral narration activities.

The results presented in Table 1 provide clear evidence addressing the first research question: ¿How do digital reading tools impact select learners in developing their oral narrative skills? The findings show that the use of the Lithium EPUB Reader, combined with structured narration tasks, enhanced learners' oral performance in multiple dimensions. Fluency improved as rehearsals reduced hesitation and fillers, while pronunciation became

more accurate through voice typing and bilingual support. Vocabulary development was also evident, with learners accessing translation and dictionary features to expand their lexical range. These outcomes indicate that digital reading tools had a measurable impact on the technical aspects of oral narration, allowing learners to produce more fluent, accurate, and lexically rich narratives.

With regard to the second research question: What are the key factors influencing the learners from the classroom activities? The analysis highlights that learner engagement, content preparation, and comprehension were central factors. The structured stages of reading, drafting, correction, and rehearsal provided learners with a systematic approach that reduced reliance on teacher support and fostered greater independence. The bilingual and audio features of the tool supported comprehension, enabling learners to grasp story flow and organisation more effectively. Audience engagement also emerged as a critical factor, as learners tailored their narration to maintain listener attention, which boosted their confidence. These factors, collectively, shaped the learners' ability to prepare and present oral narratives effectively.

Finally, the third research question: How can technological tools help ESL learners to engage, motivate and develop their oral narrative skills? The consistent evidence of motivation and confidence gains addresses it. The interactive features of the digital tool sustained interest in reading and narrating, while AI-assisted practice and feedback reduced speaking anxiety. Learners reported feeling more prepared and willing to share their ideas, indicating that technological support extended beyond technical skill-building to include effective dimensions of language learning. Motivation, confidence, and reduced anxiety proved essential in sustaining participation and in fostering a positive learning environment. Table 1 confirms that digital reading tools, when integrated into classroom activities, not only strengthen the linguistic components of oral narrative competence but also build learner confidence and motivation. These combined effects directly contribute to the successful development of ESL learners' oral narrative skills.

The feedback from the students also demonstrated how a digital reading tool, Lithium EPUB reader, supported the learners to engage themselves with the reading process with focus. They used the application, sharing their experiences with it, including the benefits of learning content and how it helped them prepare for the oral narrations. They read the stories easily with bilingual translation and listen to the story aloud. They comprehended the stories with ease. Then, they were able to narrate it to Google Voice typing and check their content for language corrections using Google Docs. They were able to practice the content using AI-assistance, and finally, they were able to present oral presentations confidently with their original ideas. The classroom activities were framed on the following aspects: i) Audience Engagement, ii) Content, iii) Fluency, iv) Pronunciation and v) Lexical Resources.

The

responses also showed that learners gradually became more independent in preparing for narration. Many participants stated that the tool gave them a clear structure for practice and reduced their reliance on teacher guidance. By moving through reading, correction, and rehearsal stages on their own, they developed greater confidence in managing the tasks. Several learners reported that they felt less anxious about speaking in front of others, as they had rehearsed with both text and voice support. This reduction in hesitation helped them focus more on the flow of ideas rather than on the fear of making mistakes. Overall, the results indicate that the tool not only built technical skills in pronunciation and vocabulary but also supported the emotional side of speaking, giving students a stronger sense of readiness and control during oral narration.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of digital reading tools in enhancing narrative oral skills among selected ESL learners. The participants in the experimental group of the I B.Sc. Chemistry showed significantly greater improvement in post-activity performance compared to those in the control group, with a large effect size indicating the practical impact of the intervention. These results support the growing body of research that highlights the benefits of Technology-Integrated Language Learning for language learners, particularly those that facilitate digital support. One of the key contributions of this study is the identification of specific learning processes, particularly reading through a digital reading tool, preparing the original draft for oral narration with the support of AI for language correction and practising purposes. It gives the students confidence to make the final draft with ease. This supports theoretical perspectives that conceptualise oral narration as a process, where digital tools play a central role in the development of oral narrative proficiency. The digital reading tool platform enables students to track and train, fostering a deeper understanding of oral narration and its connection to learning objectives. The collection of feedback based on a technological tool significantly enhances performance. Their presence may have supported learner engagement, motivation, and a bilingual approach using Google Translate in the tool, as well as cultural understanding through their first language. The findings align with prior research suggesting that a platform like Lithium EPUB Reader, a digital tool, is important for reading comprehension that may enhance learning, understanding and the preparation process for ESL learners from diverse cultures who are from Tamil and Urdu backgrounds. It promotes learner autonomy and engagement, even when its most visible features are not directly linked to text-based outcomes (Hafner & Miller, 2011). The present research helped the selected learners to develop their communicative competence through their attempts at presenting after intensive preparations, focusing on and trying wholeheartedly to make oral narrations. They were able

to improve their phonological awareness because of their practices and feedback from the audience. The oral narrations motivated them to learn the language with interest.

The oral feedback, along with learner responses during the training, stated that the practical sessions using the application helped them prepare with confidence, learn with pleasure and lively, and practice wholeheartedly with the variety of options in the application, ultimately enabling them to manage the audience during presentations. Their engagement in reading tools boosted their confidence and presentation skills. Secondly, they were able to prepare their content with the support of different utilities in the application, and they understood their content and delivered oral narration with confidence. Thirdly, they were fluent in their oral narrations with a slow and steady approach of delivery and convincing the audience with the flow of thoughts in a structured way, and finally, they were checking lexical usages of stories in the given texts bilingually using the application, and they were able to practice it while narrating the stories. Overall, the results affirm the pedagogical potential of digital reading tools when used with data-informed and multi-instructional strategies through the benefits of the application. The analytic capabilities of these platforms offer new opportunities for educators to monitor student progress, tailor feedback, and support differentiated instruction. These findings also point to future directions for research, including the exploration of multimodal assessment frameworks and the application of more advanced reading tools to better understand and long-term speaking development.

These findings are consistent with earlier research that has highlighted the positive role of digital storytelling and digital reading in fostering oral fluency and narrative competence among second language learners. Hwang et al. (2016), for example, demonstrated that web-based storytelling activities significantly improved learners' speaking accuracy, pronunciation, and overall oral performance, confirming that technology-enhanced tasks create meaningful contexts for practice and expression. Similarly, Reiber-Kuijpers, Kral, and Meijer (2021) reported that digital reading environments support comprehension and motivation, which in turn contribute to the quality of oral outputs. The present study, therefore, adds to this growing body of evidence by showing that structured digital reading tools not only aid in comprehension but also provide a systematic pathway for preparing, practising, and performing oral narratives with confidence.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into using a digital reading tool in preparation and developing oral narrative skills. For future research and practice, it's essential to evaluate outcomes explicitly on oral narrative skills in the teaching and learning process, from reading to speaking. There is considerable scope to incorporate strategies that

foster process-based feedback and strategic scaffolding in digital reading-to-speaking tasks. Key lessons from this research centre on analysing and getting insights based on (i) learning impact in developing their oral narrative skills, (ii) key factors influencing the learners in classroom activities and (iii) feedback on using technological tools in engaging, motivating and developing their oral narrative skills. While this study focused narrowly on the digital reading tool for speaking tasks, it can be further extended to other aspects of oral narration skills. The researchers tried to use the method and received good feedback. Thus, research contributes to a practical reading tool at this juncture. This study can be applied to diverse ESL classrooms with different digital tools for reading, and other tools could be tried to develop other macro skills in English. This research could support educators who try to implement this framework in training and learning processes.

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