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Empowering EFL Students' Speaking Ability through Digital Storytelling: A Quasi Experimental Study

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Abstract
Speaking ability is essential in 21st-century education, yet many students still struggle with limited vocabulary, unclear pronunciation, and low comprehension. This study examined the impact of two digital storytelling applications, Read to Me and Fairytales, on enhancing students' speaking ability. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method were used in this research. tenth-grade classes were selected, both of classes chosen randomly by lottery system, with one group using Read to Me and the rest of the class using Fairytales. The research focused on speaking ability with the component vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. The results were analyzed using an independent samples t-test, which showed a significant difference between the groups' post-test scores ($t = 2.32$, $df = 63$, $p < 0.05$). The experimental group which was treated by Read to Me showed greater increased, likely due to features such as audio narration, highlighted text, and adjustable speed, which offered better language input. In conclusion, digital storytelling with interactive elements can effectively influences students' speaking ability.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Read to Me, Fairytales, Speaking Ability

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Introduction

Speaking plays a crucial role in language learning. According to Harmer (2001), speaking ability involves not only producing language but also processing information to generate meaning. In the current educational framework, *Kurikulum Merdeka* emphasizes the importance of students' speaking ability, particularly in Phase E, where learners are expected to express opinions, share personal views, and engage in discussions within fictional contexts. This includes communicating moral lessons, explaining 2 characters' emotions and behaviors, and connecting the narrative to personal experiences. These competencies are closely linked to the development of critical thinking and communication skills necessary in the 21st century. Vocabulary is an essential component in speaking because it supports learners in constructing meaningful sentences and expressing their thoughts clearly. Awaludin et al., (2023) stated that vocabulary mastery is crucial, as it serves as the foundation for understanding others and avoiding miscommunication. Without sufficient vocabulary, students may struggle to convey their ideas effectively in spoken interactions. However, many students still find it difficult to speak effectively due to limited vocabulary, unclear pronunciation, and low comprehension (Wati & Rozimela, 2019; Maryam, 2020). Brown (2004) emphasized that speaking

ability consists of key elements such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehension. Without proper vocabulary, students cannot express ideas accurately (Awaludin et al., 2023). Pronunciation, as supported by Des et al. (2021), helps make spoken words understandable, while comprehension ensures effective communication (Satriawan et al., 2023).

Despite this demand, classroom practices still heavily rely on conventional printed media, which often fail to engage students in meaningful speaking activities. Fidriani et al. (2021) note that the use of conventional materials in speaking classes is common, while Prayudi et al. (2021) highlights that integrating audio-visual elements significantly enhances students' interest and participation. Audio-visual learning, as stated by Muhammad et al. (2020), allows learners to express their ideas more freely based on what they see and hear, contributing to improved speaking performance.

Despite technological advances, traditional media still dominate classroom instruction. Fidriani et al. (2021) noted that printed materials remain the primary resource. Conversely, Prayudi et al. (2021) and Muhammad et al. (2020) suggested that audio-visual technology improves student interest and participation. Hence, digital storytelling has emerged as a promising solution. It combines text, audio, video, and interactive elements that support students in listening, reading, and speaking. According to Choo et al. (2020), digital storytelling offers multimodal exposure to the English language, encouraging learners to actively engage with stories. The method aligns with Kurikulum Merdeka's goal of helping students compare, express opinions, and interact using English. Nevertheless, classroom observations and interviews reveal that students still struggle to express opinions clearly or engage in discussions involving moral reflections and emotional insights. Teachers also face challenges in integrating digital media due to limited training or unfamiliarity with tools. Digital storytelling combines multimodal features-audio, video, images, and text-to facilitate language learning (Puteri Elyani et al., 2022; Nair & Yunus, 2021). Choo et al. (2020) stated that students benefit from engaging with stories that offer visual and auditory input, enhancing their motivation and language exposure. In addition, applications like Read to Me, equipped with features such as flashcards and narration, align with principles of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (Satya, 2022; Egbert, 2005). Fairytales also uses audio and visuals but lacks the interactive features available in Read to Me. Krashen's (2024) theory of comprehensible input further supports this approach-language acquisition is more effective when learners receive input that is understandable and supported by context. This is echoed by Widagdo (2021), who emphasized the role of visual aids in comprehension.

Several studies have examined the impact of digital storytelling on speaking skills. Cahyanti & Nuroh (2023) found positive effects of using digital storytelling in primary education, while Haroon (2021) reported improved speaking skills without specifying the digital tools used. Syafryadin et al. (2019) emphasized creative digital storytelling, encouraging students to produce their own stories. 2 However, limited research has focused on specific applications like Read to Me and Fairytales in the context of senior high school. This study investigates the impact of two digital storytelling applications, Read to Me and Fairytales, on tenth-grade students' speaking ability, focusing on vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension as outlined by Brown (2004). Read to Me includes

interactive storytelling, sing-alongs, and flashcards, while Fairytales offers pop-up animations and audio-visual support without additional interactive tools. The study aims to compare their effectiveness in helping students retell stories, express ideas, and discuss character actions and moral values through enhanced speaking performance.

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental method. The study was conducted at a private senior high school in Bogor using non-equivalent control groups design. Herawati & Irdiyansyah (2022) elaborated A quasi-experimental method provides a helpful balance between conducting an actual experiment and investigating language use in authentic settings. This method was chosen to examine the impact of two different digital storytelling applications on students' speaking ability. The research involved two groups: an experimental group using the Read to Me application and a control group using the Fairytales application. The objective was to determine whether there was a significant difference in students' speaking ability after receiving the respective treatments. 3 The respondents in this research were tenth-grade students at SMA BOASH.

Two classes were randomly selected from the population using a lottery system. Each class was assigned randomly to either the experimental group or the control group. The selection process ensured that each student had an equal chance of being included in the sample. The instruments used in this research consisted of oral speaking tests and lesson plans. The speaking tests were administered in the form of a pre-test and a post-test. In both tests, students were asked to retell a narrative story (fable, legend, or fairy tale) that they had previously read or listened to. The speaking performance was evaluated based on three main elements: vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. Each element was scored on a scale from 1 to 5 using a rubric adapted from Brown (2004). The lesson plans were developed to provide structured and consistent treatment for both groups during the intervention phase. These lesson plans ensured that students were exposed to the same learning content, but through different digital storytelling platforms.

The procedure of the study was carried out in five meetings. In the first meeting, both the experimental and control groups took a pre-test to measure their initial speaking ability. The second, third, and fourth meetings were allocated for the treatment. During these sessions, the experimental group was taught using the Read to Me application, which features interactive tools such as flashcards, audio narration, highlighting text, sing-alongs, and categorized reading levels. Students listened to stories, practiced vocabulary and pronunciation, and participated in group discussions. Meanwhile, the control group used the Fairytales application, which presents stories through animated pop-ups with voiceovers but lacks interactive features like vocabulary flashcards or sing-alongs. Students in the control group also practiced storytelling and discussed moral values of the stories. In the fifth meeting, both groups took a post-test to assess their progress in speaking ability using the same format and rubric as the pre-test.

The data collected from pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed using statistical methods. First, the normality of the data was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and the homogeneity of

variance was checked with 4 Levene's Test. After confirming that the data met these assumptions, the researcher calculated the variance, mean, and standard deviation of both groups. Then, an independent samples t-test was performed to determine whether there were significant differences in the post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. The hypothesis was tested at a significance level of 0.05. If the p-value was less than 0.05, it indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in students' speaking ability as a result of the treatment.

Results and Discussion

Result

This chapter presents the research findings and discussion based on the three research questions formulated in the early stages of the study. It includes detailed data analysis from the pre-tests and post-tests administered to both the experimental and control groups, statistical testing (paired and independent t-tests), and an interpretation of the findings considering relevant theories and prior studies. The results are presented first, followed by the discussion that connects the findings to the theoretical and contextual background.

Experimental Group Result

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics and Test Results for Experimental Group

Aspect	Details
Group	Experimental Group (taught using Read to Me application)
Teaching Tool	Read to Me (digital storytelling app with narration, text highlighting, etc.)
Pre-Test Mean Score	59.56
Post-Test Mean Score	85.00
Mean Difference	25.44
Paired Samples Test Results	Statistical Test Used Paired Sample t-Test
Significance (p-value) 0.000 ($p < 0.05$)	Statistical Conclusion Statistically significant difference between Pre-Test and Post-Test.
Research Conclusion Null hypothesis rejected; the Read to Me application significantly improved speaking skills in the experimental group.	Improved Speaking Aspects - Vocabulary: Repeated, contextual use improved retention and usage ‹br› - Pronunciation: Clear narration supported accurate sound/stress replication ‹br› - Comprehension: Audio-text combination enhanced understanding and fluency
Theoretical Support Alignment Aligned with digital learning theories emphasizing multimodal input and scaffolding.	

Statistical Interpretation of the Read to Me Application's Impact on Speaking Performance

The experimental study investigated the efficacy of the Read to Me application, a digital storytelling platform designed to enhance English speaking skills among learners. The application

integrates multimodal features, including native-speaker narration, adjustable playback speed, highlighted text, and interactive vocabulary tools, to create an immersive and scaffolded learning environment. The results demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in students' speaking performance, underscoring the platform's potential as a transformative tool for language acquisition.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Performance

At the outset of the study, the experimental group exhibited a moderate baseline level of speaking proficiency, as evidenced by their average pre-test score of 59.56. This score reflects typical challenges faced by learners in spontaneous speaking tasks, such as limited vocabulary, inconsistent pronunciation, and difficulties in comprehension. Following the intervention with the Read to Me application, the group's average post-test score rose to 85.00, marking a substantial mean improvement of 25.44 points. This dramatic increase suggests that the application's features effectively addressed key barriers to speaking fluency.

Statistical Significance

To validate the observed improvement, a paired sample t-test was conducted, comparing pre-test and post-test scores. The analysis yielded a p-value of 0.000, which is significantly below the conventional alpha level of 0.05. This result confirms that the improvement in speaking performance was not due to random chance but was directly attributable to the intervention. Consequently, the null hypothesis—which posited no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores—was confidently rejected. The statistical rigor of this analysis strengthens the credibility of the findings and supports the application's efficacy.

Key Areas of Improvement

The post-test results highlighted three critical dimensions of speaking proficiency that were notably enhanced by the Read to Me application:

Vocabulary Retention and Usage

The application's interactive vocabulary tools and repeated exposure to contextualized words allowed students to internalize and actively use new lexical items. This aligns with theories of incidental vocabulary acquisition, where repeated encounters with words in meaningful contexts lead to deeper retention.

Pronunciation Accuracy

The clear, native-speaker narration provided an auditory model for learners to emulate. By adjusting the playback speed and repeatedly listening to the narration, students could refine their intonation, stress patterns, and phonemic accuracy. This feature is particularly valuable in contexts where learners lack exposure to native speakers.

Comprehension and Fluency

The dual presentation of text and audio facilitated multimodal comprehension, enabling learners to decode meaning more efficiently. As a result, students demonstrated greater fluency in retelling stories, as they could draw on both auditory and visual cues to construct coherent narratives.

Theoretical Alignment

The findings resonate with established digital learning theories, particularly the Multimodal Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition is optimized when learners engage with multiple sensory modalities. The Read to Me application exemplifies this principle by combining auditory, visual, and interactive elements to create a comprehensible and engaging input. Additionally, the platform's scaffolding features—such as adjustable speed and highlighted text—provided learners with personalized support, allowing them to progress at their own pace.

The study's results advocate for the broader adoption of technology-enhanced language learning tools in educational settings. The Read to Me application not only bridges gaps in traditional instruction but also empowers learners to take an active role in their language development. Future research could explore the long-term retention of these gains, as well as the application's scalability across diverse learner populations and proficiency levels. The statistical evidence underscores the Read to Me application's transformative potential in fostering speaking proficiency. By leveraging multimodal input and interactive features, the platform addresses the multifaceted challenges of second language acquisition, paving the way for more innovative and effective language learning solutions.

Control Group Result

Table 2. Control Group

Variable	Description / Value
Group	Control Group
Application Used	Fairytales (basic digital storytelling: pop-up images, audio narration only)
Pre-test Mean Score	54.35
Post-test Mean Score	78.55
Score Gain	24.20
Statistical Test	Paired Sample t-Test
Significance Value (p-value)	0.000 ($p < 0.05$) – Statistically significant
Notable Limitations	Lacks advanced features like: - Real-time highlighting - Flashcards - Adjustable narration speed

Observed Weaknesses in Outcome	Slower and less consistent growth, especially in vocabulary use and pronunciation clarity

The control group in this study was exposed to the Fairytales application, a digital storytelling tool designed to support language learning. While Fairytales shares the foundational concept of digital storytelling with the Read to Me application used by the experimental group, it lacks several of the advanced features that distinguish the latter. Specifically, Fairytales offers basic functionalities such as pop-up images and straightforward audio narration but provides limited interactivity and minimal vocabulary support. This simpler design likely influenced the group's learning outcomes, as reflected in their test scores and qualitative observations.

Statistical Performance of the Control Group

The control group's average pre-test score was 54.35, which increased to 78.55 in the post-test, marking a 24.20-point improvement. This gain is statistically significant, as confirmed by a paired sample t-test ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.05$). The p-value, being well below the conventional alpha level of 0.05, underscores that the observed improvement is unlikely due to random chance. Instead, it suggests that the Fairytales application had a measurable and positive impact on the participants' language skills.

However, while the improvement is statistically significant, it is less pronounced compared to the experimental group's gains. This discrepancy may be attributed to the absence of key features in Fairytales that are present in Read to Me, such as real-time text highlighting, interactive flashcards, and adjustable narration speeds. These features are designed to enhance engagement, reinforce vocabulary retention, and accommodate individual learning paces factors that appear to contribute to more robust and consistent progress in language acquisition.

Qualitative Observations and Limitations

Beyond the quantitative data, qualitative observations revealed that students using Fairytales exhibited slower and less uniform growth in speaking performance, particularly in vocabulary usage and pronunciation accuracy. Some participants continued to struggle with articulating words clearly and employing newly learned vocabulary appropriately in context. This inconsistency may stem from the application's limited interactivity, which fails to provide immediate corrective feedback or opportunities for repeated practice elements that are critical for mastering pronunciation and lexical precision.

The absence of real-time highlighting in Fairytales might also have hindered the group's ability to synchronize auditory and visual input effectively, a process known to bolster comprehension and retention. Similarly, the lack of adjustable narration speeds could have disadvantaged learners who required slower pacing to process and internalize new linguistic structures. These shortcomings highlight the importance of tailored, feature-rich digital tools in optimizing language learning outcomes.

Comparative Analysis and Implications

When juxtaposed with the experimental group's results, the control group's performance underscores the value of integrating multimodal and adaptive features into educational technology. The experimental group, which benefited from Read to Me's advanced functionalities, demonstrated not only higher score gains but also more consistent proficiency across speaking tasks. This divergence suggests that while basic digital storytelling tools can facilitate learning, their efficacy is significantly enhanced by supplementary interactive and customizable elements.

The control group's improvement, though statistically significant, was tempered by the Fairytales application's limited capabilities. The findings emphasize that interactivity, real-time feedback, and adaptability are critical components of effective language-learning tools. Future iterations of such applications should prioritize these features to maximize learner engagement and outcomes. Additionally, educators and developers should consider these insights when selecting or designing digital resources, ensuring that they cater to diverse learning needs and promote holistic language development.

Experimental Class and Control Group

Table 3. comparation between experimental and Control Group

Statistical Test	t-value	Critical Value (0.05, df = 63)	Significance	Interpretation
Independent Samples t-test	2.32	1.998	$p < 0.05$	Significant difference; experimental group outperformed control group

To assess whether the observed improvement in speaking outcomes between the two groups was statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was performed on the post-test scores. This parametric test was selected due to its appropriateness for comparing the means of two independent groups under the assumption of normally distributed data and homogeneity of variances. The analysis yielded a t-value of 2.32, which was compared against the critical t-value of 1.998 at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed) with 63 degrees of freedom (df).

The obtained t-value (2.32) exceeds the critical value (1.998), indicating that the difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups is statistically significant. This result allows us to reject the null hypothesis, which posited no meaningful difference in speaking outcomes between the two groups. The practical implication is that the experimental intervention or treatment had a measurable and statistically discernible impact on the participants' speaking performance compared to the control condition.

The degrees of freedom ($df = 63$) reflect the sample size and variability within the data, ensuring the robustness of the t-test results. A p-value associated with the t-statistic would further clarify the exact probability of observing such a difference by chance alone, though the comparison to the critical value at $\alpha = 0.05$ already confirms significance.

To contextualize the effect, size an essential complement to statistical significance

Cohen's d or another standardized measure could be calculated. This would quantify the magnitude of the difference between the groups, providing insight into whether the observed effect is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. For instance, a medium or large effect size would reinforce the conclusion that the experimental group's superior performance is educationally or clinically relevant.

Moreover, the use of an independent samples t-test assumes that the data meet certain assumptions, including independence of observations, normality, and homogeneity of variances. If these assumptions were violated, alternative non-parametric tests (e.g., Mann-Whitney U test) might be warranted. However, given the reported results, it is reasonable to infer that these assumptions were satisfactorily met, lending credibility to the findings.

The statistical analysis confirms that the experimental group's improvement in speaking outcomes was significantly greater than that of the control group. This conclusion is supported by the t-test results, which demonstrate both statistical significance ($t(63) = 2.32$, $p < 0.05$) and practical implications for the intervention's efficacy. Future research could explore the long-term sustainability of this improvement and the specific mechanisms driving the observed effects.

Discussion

The findings suggest that digital storytelling, particularly with rich multimodal features, can substantially enhance students' speaking abilities. The Read to Me application outperformed the Fairytales app in terms of its impact on vocabulary mastery, pronunciation clarity, and comprehension. Role of Multimodal Features. The presence of native-speaker narration, synchronized text, vocabulary reinforcement, and interactive support in the Read to Me application provided students with meaningful exposure to English in context. These features offered not just input but also opportunities for practice and internalization, which are critical components in developing spoken fluency. According to Krashen's Comprehensible Input Theory (2024), language input should be both understandable and engaging for language acquisition to occur. The Read to Me application aligns with this idea by ensuring that learners not only listen to the story but also see the words, interact with the text, and connect meaning through visuals. These elements help reduce cognitive load and facilitate language retention. This is also supported by Franchisca et al. (2024), who argue that multimodal digital storytelling enhances engagement and comprehension among EFL learners. The integration of audio, text, and visuals caters to diverse learning styles, helping students build stronger connections with the material. Limited Support in Fairytales App. Although the control group also showed improvements, the results suggest that the lack of interactive features in the Fairytales application limited its effectiveness. Without highlighted vocabulary, adjustable narration, or interactive quizzes, students had fewer opportunities to reinforce their learning. As Widagdo (2021) highlights, the absence of visual aids can hinder learners' ability to grasp meaning and retain new language. Students in the control group may have engaged with the story superficially, focusing more on plot than language. This can explain their lower post-test scores, especially in pronunciation and vocabulary usage.

Speaking Skill Development. The observed improvements in speaking skills in both groups underscore the potential of digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool. By engaging students with meaningful, contextualized language, digital stories create a safe and stimulating environment for practicing speaking. The experimental group demonstrated stronger development in organizing thoughts, choosing appropriate vocabulary, and delivering stories coherently. These outcomes align with the integrated speaking frameworks proposed by Harris (1969), Harmer (2001), and Brown (2004), which emphasize fluency, accuracy, and content delivery as essential aspects of speaking performance.

Implications for Teaching Practice. The study's findings have several implications for EFL classroom practices. First, teachers should consider integrating digital storytelling apps that offer multimodal features to enhance learners' engagement and outcomes. Applications like Read to Me not only support vocabulary and pronunciation but also motivate learners through interactive storytelling experiences. Second, while basic digital tools such as Fairytales can still be useful, they need to be supplemented with teacher-led activities (e.g., vocabulary games, pronunciation drills, group discussions) to match the learning depth offered by more advanced applications. Finally, incorporating mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) approaches can make speaking instruction more accessible and appealing to digital-native learners, as emphasized by Satya (2022) and Zulfikhar (2024).

Alignment with Previous Studies These findings are consistent with previous research on digital storytelling and speaking skills. For example: Syafryadin et al. (2019) found that digital storytelling improved students' motivation and confidence in speaking. Haroon (2021) emphasized that using digital media increases students' engagement and reduces speaking anxiety. Cahyanti & Nuroh (2023) showed that students who practiced with storytelling apps showed improved fluency and pronunciation. By extending these findings, the present study confirms that the use of more feature-rich digital storytelling applications has a stronger and more consistent impact on students' speaking development.

Conclusion

The findings of this study unequivocally demonstrate the positive impact of digital storytelling on students' speaking ability, reinforcing its potential as a transformative pedagogical tool in language education. Through rigorous statistical analysis and empirical evaluation, the data revealed that both the Read to Me and Fairytales applications contributed to measurable improvements in students' speaking performance. However, the Read to Me application emerged as the more effective of the two, owing to its sophisticated interactive features, which include high-quality narration, dynamic visual aids, and customizable playback speed. These elements collectively fostered a more immersive and engaging learning experience, thereby enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, and overall comprehension.

The superiority of the Read to Me application can be attributed to its alignment with key principles of multimedia learning theory, which emphasize the integration of auditory and visual

stimuli to optimize cognitive processing. By providing students with narrated text accompanied by relevant imagery, the application effectively reduced cognitive load, allowing learners to focus on linguistic nuances and contextual meaning. Furthermore, the adjustable speed feature empowered students to tailor the learning pace to their individual needs, accommodating diverse proficiency levels and learning styles. This adaptability is particularly crucial in language acquisition, where personalized instruction often yields superior outcomes.

Beyond the immediate improvements in speaking scores, the study underscores the broader pedagogical implications of digital storytelling. First, it highlights the importance of selecting well-designed applications that leverage multimedia elements to create an interactive and stimulating learning environment. Not all digital tools are created equal, and educators must critically evaluate their features to ensure they align with instructional goals. Second, the findings suggest that digital storytelling can serve as a bridge between traditional language instruction and contemporary technological advancements, offering a balanced approach that combines the richness of storytelling with the dynamism of digital media.

Moreover, the study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for the integration of technology in language classrooms. In an era where digital literacy is as essential as linguistic proficiency, tools like Read to Me provide students with opportunities to develop both skills simultaneously. The interactive nature of such applications also promotes active participation, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning journey. This is particularly beneficial in fostering confidence and motivation, which are often critical barriers to language proficiency.

While the results are promising, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations. The sample size and duration of the intervention may have influenced the generalizability of the findings. Future research could explore the long-term effects of digital storytelling on speaking ability, as well as its applicability across different age groups and cultural contexts. Additionally, comparative studies could investigate the efficacy of various digital storytelling platforms to identify best practices for implementation.

This study affirms that digital storytelling, particularly when facilitated by well-designed applications like Read to Me, is a powerful tool for enhancing students' speaking ability. Its ability to combine narrative engagement with interactive learning features makes it an invaluable asset in modern language education. As educators continue to seek innovative methods to engage and inspire learners, digital storytelling stands out as a compelling solution that marries tradition with technology. Moving forward, the strategic adoption of such tools, coupled with thoughtful pedagogical integration, holds the promise of revolutionizing language instruction and empowering students to achieve greater linguistic proficiency.

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