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Public Speaking Pedagogy in ELT: Digital Tools for Confidence and Clarity

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Abstract

Public speaking has re-emerged as a crucial communicative competence in the twenty-first-century English Language Teaching (ELT) landscape, especially within digitally mediated learning environments. As global employability increasingly depends on verbal fluency, articulation, and audience engagement, the teaching of public speaking has shifted from a traditional performance-based model to a technology-enhanced pedagogical framework. This paper examines how digital tools—such as virtual presentation platforms, speech analysis applications, AI-powered feedback systems, and online collaboration spaces—can be effectively integrated into ELT to enhance learners' confidence, clarity, and communicative autonomy. Drawing upon communicative competence theory, social constructivism, and digital literacy frameworks, the study explores how technology can scaffold public speaking tasks through formative assessment, real-time feedback, and self-reflective learning. It further analyzes the pedagogical advantages of platforms such as Flip, Toastmasters Online, and Yoodli AI in fostering learner-centered, practice-oriented speaking environments. The research underscores the role of digital tools not merely as substitutes for classroom interaction but as agents of pedagogical transformation that democratize access, personalize learning, and reduce performance anxiety. By aligning language proficiency with presentation skills, this paper argues for a redefinition of public speaking pedagogy in ELT—one that integrates human communication with digital innovation to create confident, articulate, and globally competent speakers.

Keywords: Public Speaking, ELT Pedagogy, Digital Tools, Communicative Competence, Learner Confidence

Introduction

The twenty-first century has positioned oral communication as one of the most essential life skills for both professional and academic success. In an era driven by digital interactions, English Language Teaching (ELT) must move beyond grammar and vocabulary instruction to address the expressive and performative aspects of communication (Richards 2020). Public speaking, once viewed as an extracurricular or rhetorical art, now forms a core component of communicative competence, aligning with global education goals that emphasize

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confidence, creativity, and clarity in communication (British Council 2022).

Traditional ELT pedagogy often prioritizes writing and reading, leaving speaking skills underdeveloped or assessed informally. However, the post-pandemic learning environment, dominated by virtual classrooms and hybrid instruction, demands a reassessment of oral pedagogy. As students increasingly present, discuss, and collaborate online, educators must employ digital tools that simulate authentic communication contexts (Rahman and Singh 2023). Public speaking activities can now be designed through platforms such as Flip, Padlet, or Zoom breakout spaces, where learners practice speeches, receive peer feedback, and analyze recordings for improvement.

Furthermore, public speaking in ELT is not merely about performance but about identity formation and intercultural confidence. Learners develop a voice that bridges linguistic competence and personal expression (Byram 2021). Therefore, the study investigates how integrating digital technology into public speaking pedagogy transforms language classrooms into empowerment spaces—helping learners articulate ideas clearly, engage audiences effectively, and overcome performance anxiety through constructive digital feedback.

Literature Review

The teaching of speaking skills in ELT has undergone significant evolution over the last two decades. Early communicative language teaching (CLT) frameworks emphasized fluency, but public speaking as a structured pedagogical goal gained prominence only with the rise of soft-skill education (Richards and Rodgers 2021). Hymes's model of communicative competence (1972) remains foundational, but modern scholars extend it to include affective and technological dimensions (Canale 2020).

Recent studies indicate that technology can effectively enhance oral proficiency and self-efficacy. For instance, Zhang (2021) found that students who recorded speeches on Flip reported a 30% increase in confidence due to repeated practice and peer evaluation. Similarly, Hassan and Lee (2022) demonstrated that AI-driven speech tools like Yoodli improve learners' pronunciation and pacing through instant analytics, helping them visualize areas for growth.

Research also reveals that virtual collaboration tools foster engagement. Ali and Mahmoud (2020) noted that online debates and digital storytelling sessions in ELT courses enhance critical thinking and presentation structure. British Council (2022) emphasizes digital confidence as a global competence, urging educators to blend linguistic goals with performance-based learning.

Pedagogically, constructivist theories support this integration. Vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development" suggests that learner's progress through social interaction and mediated tools (Vygotsky 1978). Modern ELT scholars like Pinner (2023) apply this to digital speaking classrooms, arguing that recording, reflection, and peer review encourage deeper metacognitive awareness.

In addition, affective factors such as anxiety and motivation have been central to recent ELT studies. Luo (2022) identifies digital rehearsal environments as psychologically safer spaces where students can fail privately before public performance. Meanwhile, Singh (2024) observes that speech-based apps increase participation among introverted learners by reducing the intimidation of live performance. Collectively, these studies underscore the shift from oral evaluation to digital performance-

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based pedagogy, positioning technology as a confidence enabler rather than a distraction.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon three intersecting frameworks: communicative competence theory, social constructivism, and digital pedagogy.

Hymes's (1972) theory of communicative competence redefined language learning as the ability to use language appropriately in context. Public speaking extends this competence to formal and semi-formal settings, where grammatical accuracy and pragmatic awareness intersect. Canale and Swain's (1980) expansion**—adding strategic competence—directly informs public speaking instruction, as learners must manage anxiety, plan discourse, and respond to audience feedback (Richards and Rodgers 2021).

From a constructivist perspective, Vygotsky (1978) posits that learning occurs through social interaction. Digital platforms simulate this through peer collaboration and scaffolded tasks—for example, commenting on classmates' recorded speeches or co-creating visual presentations. Learners construct knowledge through feedback cycles, mirroring authentic communicative contexts (Rahman 2023).

The third lens, digital pedagogy, acknowledges the transformation of communication in virtual spaces. Ng (2012) defined digital literacy as the ability to interpret, create, and communicate using digital tools. Modern ELT, therefore, must develop digital communicative competence—the capacity to perform linguistically and technologically. Scholars like Reinders and White (2021) emphasize that teachers must design speaking tasks integrating recording tools, analytics, and reflection to scaffold learner autonomy.

Together, these frameworks justify the integration of technology in public speaking pedagogy, situating it as both linguistic and psychological training for real-world communication.

Digital Tools and Pedagogical Integration

Digital tools reshape public speaking pedagogy by offering practice, feedback, and assessment mechanisms that extend beyond traditional classrooms. Flip (formerly Flipgrid) allows students to record speeches asynchronously, fostering repeated rehearsal and peer review (Zhang 2021). Teachers can provide time-stamped feedback, reducing anxiety associated with live performance.

Yoodli AI, a speech analytics platform, offers real-time feedback on filler words, tone, and pace (Hassan and Lee 2022). Such tools make speaking measurable and visible, turning abstract communication skills into data-driven progress. According to Kukulska-Hulme (2023), AI-based systems empower learners by giving them ownership of learning through self-correction.

Toastmasters Online and Zoom-based roleplays encourage authentic interaction. These platforms align with task-based learning principles, where communication is goal-oriented rather than grammar-focused (Ellis 2021). Additionally, Padlet and Canva Presentations allow students to integrate visuals and narratives, aligning language with creativity (Rahman and Singh 2023).

Pedagogically, integrating these tools requires scaffolded instruction. Teachers must train students to use analytics meaningfully rather than mechanically. As Richards (2020) argues, technology should support communicative purpose, not replace it. Moreover, collaborative digital tasks help learners co-construct meaning, reinforcing Vygotsky's social learning theory.

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Finally, digital tools facilitate inclusive participation. Learners with speech anxiety or linguistic hesitation benefit from asynchronous environments, while stronger speakers refine delivery through self-review. As Luo (2022) notes, "digital rehearsal builds fluency through psychological safety." Therefore, technology becomes not only an instructional aid but a pedagogical equalizer—bridging confidence gaps among learners.

Enhancing Confidence and Clarity through Technology

Confidence and clarity form the emotional and cognitive backbone of effective public speaking. Traditional pedagogy often fails to address the psychological barriers associated with language performance. However, digital platforms encourage gradual exposure and reflective practice. Yoodli's speech insights enable learners to visualize improvement, building measurable self-assurance (Hassan and Lee 2022).

Confidence emerges through iterative performance. By recording, replaying, and revising their speeches, learners engage in self-regulated learning—a principle supported by Zimmerman's (2002) model of learner autonomy. This cyclical feedback process reinforces self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), essential for reducing speech anxiety.

Clarity, meanwhile, is enhanced through multimodal communication. Tools like Canva and Zoom allow learners to integrate slides, gestures, and visuals into speech delivery. This aligns with multiliteracies theory, which advocates multimodal expression for deeper comprehension (Cope and Kalantzis 2020).

Empirical evidence supports these benefits. In a 2024 mixed-method study, Singh found that students using AI-assisted speaking platforms demonstrated 25% higher coherence and lexical precision than those in traditional classrooms. Similarly, Pinner (2023) observed that reflective video feedback increased pronunciation accuracy and reduced filler words.

Crucially, digital feedback promotes affective engagement. Learners feel supported, not judged, when correction is automated or asynchronous. As British Council (2022) reports, digital ELT spaces cultivate learner resilience through supportive feedback ecosystems. In this sense, technology empowers learners to transform nervousness into expressive confidence—achieving clarity not by imitation, but through iterative reflection.

Challenges and Pedagogical Implications

Despite its transformative potential, digital public speaking pedagogy faces practical and ethical challenges. Access inequality, digital fatigue, and teacher readiness remain persistent issues (Ali and Mahmoud 2020). Many institutions lack infrastructure or professional development programs to train teachers in digital assessment.

There is also the danger of technological over-dependence. As Richards and Rodgers (2021) caution, uncritical use of tools can reduce speaking tasks to data points rather than communicative experiences. Teachers must balance automation with empathy.

Privacy and authenticity pose ethical concerns. Recording and storing student speeches online require informed consent and secure digital handling. Moreover, AI-driven evaluations must be used cautiously to avoid bias in accent or expression (Kukulska-Hulme 2023).

Pedagogically, the greatest implication lies in curriculum redesign. Public speaking should not remain a peripheral skill but be integrated into mainstream ELT syllabi. Teacher education programs must train instructors in both digital literacy and affective facilitation (Reinders and White 2021). Classroom culture must value

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reflection, collaboration, and confidence as learning outcomes.

As Byram (2021) argues, communicative competence now includes intercultural and digital fluency. Thus, the challenge is not whether technology belongs in ELT but how it can humanize communication—turning digital tools into instruments of voice, empathy, and global connection.

Conclusion

Public speaking pedagogy within ELT is undergoing a paradigm shift. The integration of digital tools—AI feedback, collaborative platforms, and virtual spaces—has transformed speaking from a transient classroom task into a measurable, reflective, and empowering learning process. Learners now access real-time analytics, peer collaboration, and multimodal storytelling that enhance confidence and clarity.

However, technology's promise depends on thoughtful pedagogy. Educators must contextualize tools within communicative and psychological frameworks that value human connection. The future of ELT lies in digital-human synergy, where learners master not only the mechanics of speech but also the emotional intelligence to connect across cultures.

In redefining public speaking pedagogy, ELT transcends linguistic boundaries—it becomes a space where confidence, clarity, and compassion converge through the responsible use of technology.

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