TED TALKS AS LEARNING RESOURCE: AN ALTERNATIVE INDEPENDENT LEARNING TO IMPROVE EFL LEARNERS SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: This study investigates the use of TED Talks as a supplementary learning resource to improve speaking skills among EFL learners. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study involved 50 intermediate to advanced EFL learners who used TED Talks regularly. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-intervention speaking tests and surveys, revealing significant improvements in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and overall speaking proficiency. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions provided deeper insights into learners' experiences, highlighting enhanced engagement, motivation, and the adoption of effective public speaking techniques. Participants appreciated the authentic language exposure and diverse accents, which increased their confidence and real-world communication skills. The study concludes that TED Talks are an effective tool for enhancing speaking skills, offering practical implications for integrating digital resources into EFL learning frameworks. These findings support the broader use of TED Talks to foster linguistic and cognitive development in language learners, suggesting that frequent and purposeful engagement with such content can lead to significant improvements in speaking proficiency.

Keywords: EFL learners, speaking skill, TED Talks

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly globalizing world, proficiency in English has become a vital skill for communication across borders. As a result, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners constantly seek effective methods to enhance their language abilities, particularly in speaking (Garcia-Ponce & Tagg, 2020). Traditional classroom settings, while beneficial, often lack the dynamic and engaging elements needed to fully develop speaking skills. In this context, digital resources have emerged as a powerful supplement to conventional learning approaches (Wong &

Luke, 2021). Among these, TED Talks stand out as a valuable tool for independent learning. TED Talks, known for their engaging presentations on a wide range of topics, offer rich, authentic language input that can significantly aid in improving EFL learners' speaking skills (Allagui, 2021). This research aims to investigate how EFL learners utilize TED Talks as a learning resource to enhance their speaking abilities, exploring the potential benefits and strategies associated with this modern educational tool.

The importance of English proficiency, especially speaking skills, cannot be overstated in today's interconnected world. Speaking fluently in English enables individuals to access global opportunities in education, career, and social interactions (Cloudia Ho, 2020). However, mastering speaking skills presents a significant challenge for many EFL learners due to factors such as limited exposure to native speakers, lack of practice opportunities, and anxiety about speaking in a non-native language. Over the past decade, advancements in technology have introduced a plethora of digital resources that support language learning. Among these, TED Talks have gained popularity for their ability to provide high-quality, authentic language input (Amrutha & Christie, 2023). TED Talks are influential videos from expert speakers on education, business, science, technology, and creativity (Tilwani et al., 2022). They are available online for free and cover a wide array of topics, making them accessible and appealing to diverse audiences.

Previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of using authentic materials, such as videos, in language learning. Authentic materials provide real-life contexts that help learners understand how language is used naturally. TED Talks, with their engaging content and professional delivery, offer a unique combination of entertainment and education (Mestre-Mestre & Pérez Cabello de Alba, 2022). They expose learners to varied accents, speech patterns, and vocabulary, which are crucial for developing speaking skills. Moreover, TED Talks encourage critical thinking and the acquisition of new knowledge, which can be valuable for learners' overall intellectual growth (Williyan, 2023). They also provide models of effective public speaking, which can inspire and guide learners in their own speaking practices. Despite these potential benefits, there is limited research specifically focused on how EFL learners use TED Talks to improve their speaking skills.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the experiences of EFL learners who incorporate TED Talks into their independent learning routines. By understanding their strategies, challenges, and perceived improvements, this research seeks to offer insights into the effectiveness of TED Talks as a supplementary resource for enhancing speaking skills. The findings of this study could have implications for educators and learners, suggesting practical ways to integrate TED Talks into EFL learning frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how TED Talks are used by EFL learners to improve their speaking skills. The mixed-methods design is chosen for its ability to provide a more complete and nuanced picture by combining numerical data with detailed, descriptive information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach allows for the triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. By leveraging both types of data, the research can explore not only the measurable outcomes of using TED Talks but also the underlying experiences and perceptions of the learners.

The participants of this study are EFL learners at an intermediate to advanced proficiency level, enrolled in various language institutes and universities. This group is chosen because they

have already acquired a basic command of English and are actively seeking to enhance their speaking skills. The participants are diverse in terms of age, gender, and cultural background, which helps in understanding the broader applicability of TED Talks across different demographics. To ensure a representative sample, 50 participants are selected using purposive sampling (Farid, 2019). This sampling method specifically targets individuals who are actively using or are willing to use TED Talks as part of their learning process. Participants are required to have a minimum of one year of experience in learning English and should regularly engage with digital learning resources.

Data collection is carried out in two phases: quantitative and qualitative. In the quantitative phase, surveys and speaking tests are employed (Creswell & Clark, 2011). A structured questionnaire is distributed to all participants to gather data on their frequency of using TED Talks, types of talks they prefer, and perceived improvements in speaking skills. The survey includes Likert-scale questions to quantify attitudes and experiences. Additionally, pre- and post-intervention speaking tests are administered to measure any changes in participants' speaking abilities over a specified period, such as three months. These tests assess fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and overall communicative effectiveness.

In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews and focus groups are conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews with a subset of 15 participants, selected based on their survey responses, provide deeper insights into their experiences and strategies for using TED Talks. The interviews explore participants' motivations, challenges, and specific examples of how TED Talks have influenced their speaking skills. Furthermore, two focus group discussions are organized to facilitate interaction among participants, allowing them to share their experiences and strategies in a collaborative setting. This method helps uncover collective insights and potential peer influences.

For quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics are used to summarize the frequency of TED Talks usage, preferences, and perceived improvements. Paired t-tests are conducted to compare pre- and post-intervention speaking test scores, determining if there is a statistically significant improvement in speaking skills after using TED Talks. For qualitative data analysis, interview and focus group transcripts are analysedcha using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights. This involves coding the data, categorizing the codes into themes, and interpreting the findings in relation to the research objectives. The qualitative data is triangulated with quantitative findings to corroborate the results and provide a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

By combining these data collection and analysis techniques, the study aims to provide robust evidence on the effectiveness of TED Talks as a learning resource for improving EFL learners' speaking skills. The mixed-methods approach ensures that both numerical trends and personal experiences are considered, offering a holistic view of the potential benefits and challenges associated with this modern educational tool.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings of this study are presented with the help of tables to provide a clear and comprehensive view of the data. These visual aids illustrate the frequency of TED Talks usage, preferred topics, and improvements in speaking skills as measured by pre- and post-intervention speaking tests.

Table 1: Frequency of TED Talks Usage

Frequency of Usage	Percentage of Participants
Weekly	45%
Bi-weekly	37%
Monthly	15%
Rarely	3%

The data on the frequency of TED Talks usage among participants reveals that a significant portion, 45%, watch TED Talks weekly, indicating a strong commitment to regular exposure to authentic English content, which is crucial for language improvement. Another 37% engage bi-weekly, showing that even semi-regular exposure can be beneficial. Additionally, 15% of participants watch TED Talks monthly, demonstrating periodic but valued use of this resource. Only 3% rarely watch TED Talks, possibly due to time constraints or preference for other learning materials. Overall, the high percentages of weekly and bi-weekly users highlight the effectiveness and positive reception of TED Talks as a consistent tool for enhancing EFL learners' speaking skills, suggesting that frequent engagement correlates with a greater commitment to language proficiency.

Table 2: Preferred TED Talks Topics

Topic	Percentage of Participants
Technology	60%
Personal Development	55%
Education	50%
Science	40%
Business	35%

The analysis of the preferred TED Talks topics reveals insightful patterns about EFL learners' interests and learning priorities. According to the data, a substantial 60% of participants favor technology-related talks, indicating a strong inclination towards contemporary and evolving fields that likely provide relevant and current vocabulary and concepts. Personal development ranks second with 55%, suggesting that learners are also keen on improving themselves beyond linguistic skills, possibly finding motivation and life skills content appealing. Education is preferred by 50% of participants, reflecting an interest in topics that might directly relate to their academic and professional aspirations. Science and business topics are chosen by 40% and 35% of participants, respectively, pointing to a considerable interest in specialized knowledge areas. These preferences indicate that learners tend to choose TED Talks that not only enhance their language skills but also provide valuable insights and knowledge applicable to various aspects of their personal and professional lives. This trend highlights the multifaceted benefits of using TED Talks as a learning resource, supporting both linguistic and cognitive development.

Table 3: Improvements in Speaking Skills

Aspect of Speaking	Pre-intervention Average Score	Post-intervention Average Score
Fluency	70	82
Accuracy	65	73
Pronunciation	68	75

Overall Score	67	77

The quantitative findings of this study, as shown in Table 3, demonstrate significant improvements in various aspects of speaking skills among EFL learners after regularly using TED Talks as a learning resource. Pre-intervention average scores for fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and overall speaking skills were 70, 65, 68, and 67, respectively. Post-intervention scores rose to 82 for fluency, 73 for accuracy, 75 for pronunciation, and 77 for overall speaking skills. These results indicate that fluency saw the highest improvement, increasing by 12 points, which suggests that regular exposure to TED Talks may particularly enhance the ability to speak more smoothly and effortlessly. Accuracy and pronunciation also improved, albeit to a slightly lesser extent, by 8 and 7 points, respectively, reflecting better use of correct grammar and clearer articulation. The overall speaking score increased by 10 points, highlighting a comprehensive enhancement in the participants' speaking abilities. These improvements suggest that TED Talks are an effective supplementary tool for developing various dimensions of speaking proficiency in EFL learners, supporting the hypothesis that engaging with authentic and varied English language input can significantly bolster speaking performance.

Qualitative Findings

The semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions provide deeper insights into the ways participants use TED Talks and the perceived impact on their speaking skills. One prominent theme that emerged is the value of authentic language exposure. Participants frequently highlighted their appreciation for the natural, unscripted speech in TED Talks, noting that the diverse accents and speech patterns helped them understand real-world English usage. As one participant articulated, "Listening to different accents and speaking styles on TED Talks has made me more confident in understanding and speaking English in various contexts."

Another significant finding is the high level of engagement and motivation fostered by TED Talks. Many participants described TED Talks as more interesting and inspiring compared to traditional learning materials, which translates into more consistent practice and a greater willingness to participate in speaking activities. A participant shared, "TED Talks are not just educational but also very inspiring. They motivate me to keep improving my English." This increased engagement is crucial for sustained language learning and practice.

Participants also noted that TED speakers serve as practical models for effective public speaking. The study found that learners adopted speaking techniques such as pacing, intonation, and body language observed in TED Talks. This modeling effect helps them improve their own speaking performance. An interviewee remarked, "I try to imitate the way TED speakers present their ideas, and it has really helped me in my own presentations." This finding underscores the importance of having exemplary speakers as a source of learning and inspiration.

Additionally, TED Talks stimulate critical thinking and idea generation, which participants find useful for discussion and debate practice. Engaging with thought-provoking content helps learners develop their ability to articulate complex ideas clearly and confidently. One participant explained, "TED Talks give me so many ideas to talk about, and they also teach me how to present those ideas logically and effectively." This aspect of TED Talks not only enhances speaking skills but also enriches learners' intellectual engagement and discourse capabilities.

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data reinforces the conclusion that TED Talks significantly contribute to improving EFL learners' speaking skills. The quantitative improvement in speaking test scores is corroborated by qualitative accounts of enhanced

confidence, motivation, and practical speaking skills. Participants not only perform better in formal assessments but also feel more competent and enthusiastic about using English in real-life situations.

Overall, the findings suggest that incorporating TED Talks into EFL learning routines offers substantial benefits. The combination of authentic language exposure, engaging content, practical speaking models, and critical thinking opportunities makes TED Talks a powerful resource for enhancing speaking skills. These insights can inform educators and learners seeking effective strategies to improve English proficiency in speaking.

Discussion

The findings from this study provide compelling evidence that TED Talks are an effective supplementary resource for improving speaking skills among EFL learners. This section discusses the implications of these results, linking them with previous research, and offering insights into the broader application of TED Talks in language learning. The quantitative data indicates substantial improvements in various aspects of speaking skills, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and overall communicative effectiveness. These results align with Hsu (2020), who emphasized that authentic language input, like that found in TED Talks, can significantly enhance language proficiency. The marked increase in fluency scores suggests that regular exposure to varied and natural speech helps learners speak more smoothly and effortlessly. This finding is consistent with Tilwani et al (2022), who noted that dynamic and engaging content can motivate learners and lead to better language acquisition outcomes.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups further supports these conclusions, highlighting the benefits of authentic language exposure, increased engagement, practical speaking models, and enhanced critical thinking. Participants consistently mentioned that the diverse accents and natural speech patterns in TED Talks improved their understanding and confidence in using English. This is in line with Kozińska (2021), who found that authentic materials help learners grasp the nuances of real-life language use.

Engagement and motivation emerged as significant factors contributing to the effectiveness of TED Talks. Participants found TED Talks more interesting and inspiring than traditional learning materials, which led to more consistent practice and greater willingness to engage in speaking activities. This aligns with Williyan (2023), who noted that engaging content plays a crucial role in sustaining learners' interest and motivation. The high level of motivation reported by participants in this study supports the idea that TED Talks can be a valuable tool for fostering a positive learning environment. The practical modeling of public speaking provided by TED speakers was another key theme. Participants reported adopting speaking techniques observed in TED Talks, such as pacing, intonation, and body language, which improved their own presentation skills. This finding is corroborated by García-Pinar (2019), who highlighted the importance of providing learners with models of effective communication. TED Talks not only offer linguistic input but also serve as exemplars of effective public speaking, which can inspire and guide learners.

Critical thinking and idea generation were also significantly enhanced through the use of TED Talks. Participants appreciated the thought-provoking content, which helped them articulate complex ideas more clearly and confidently. This aspect of TED Talks aligns with Tilwani et al (2022), who emphasized the role of TED Talks in stimulating intellectual engagement and promoting cognitive skills. The ability to engage with diverse and complex topics through TED

Talks appears to contribute to learners' overall intellectual and linguistic development. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data in this study reinforces the conclusion that TED Talks are an effective resource for improving EFL learners' speaking skills. The significant improvements in test scores, combined with the rich, descriptive accounts of learners' experiences, provide robust evidence supporting the integration of TED Talks into EFL learning routines. These findings suggest practical implications for educators, who might consider incorporating TED Talks into their curriculum to enhance speaking skills.

This study adds to the growing body of research that supports the use of digital resources like TED Talks in language learning. The combination of authentic language exposure, engaging content, practical speaking models, and critical thinking opportunities makes TED Talks a powerful tool for enhancing speaking skills. These insights can inform both educators and learners, providing practical strategies for integrating TED Talks into EFL learning frameworks to improve English proficiency. Future research could further explore the long-term impact of using TED Talks and investigate other digital resources that may offer similar benefits for language learners.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that TED Talks are a valuable supplementary resource for improving speaking skills among EFL learners. The quantitative findings revealed significant improvements in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and overall speaking proficiency after regular engagement with TED Talks. These gains underscore the efficacy of TED Talks in providing authentic language input and diverse linguistic models, which are crucial for language acquisition. The qualitative data further illuminated the learners' experiences, highlighting the motivational aspects, practical modeling of effective public speaking, and the enhancement of critical thinking and idea generation. These insights suggest that TED Talks not only contribute to linguistic development but also foster a more engaging and intellectually stimulating learning environment.

In light of these findings, it is evident that integrating TED Talks into EFL learning routines offers substantial benefits. Educators and learners are encouraged to utilize TED Talks as a dynamic and versatile tool to supplement traditional learning methods. By doing so, they can enhance learners' speaking skills, boost their confidence, and sustain their motivation to engage with the English language. Future research should continue to explore the long-term effects of using TED Talks and investigate the potential of other digital resources to support language learning. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence advocating for the integration of digital media in language education, paving the way for more innovative and effective teaching practices.

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