

Beksultanova D.R.,¹ Zhaunshiyeva Zh.B..²
^{1,2}Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University
¹2 year MA student
²PhD, Senior Lecturer
Almaty, Kazakhstan

DEVELOPING SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS OF 7TH GRADE EFL STUDENTS WITH ONLINE TOOLS

Abstract

This research explores how 7th-grade students learning English as a foreign language use online resources to improve their speaking and listening abilities. The investigation involves observing classroom activities, with emphasis on how online platforms like Microsoft Teams, Mentimeter, BBC Learning English, Quizizz and podcasts help students practice language in actual learning environments. The results suggest that digital resources offer valuable possibilities for spoken communication and access to real-world language, which helps students become better communicators. Students showed more enthusiasm and involvement when taking part in digital speaking and listening tasks compared to conventional techniques, although issues like inconsistent internet access and varying levels of language skill were noted. The research underscores how crucial it is for teachers to offer support and direction to get the most out of online platforms.

Keywords: *speaking skills, listening skills, online tools, digital education, classroom observation, EFL teaching, communicative competence*

Бексұлтанова Д.Р.¹, Жауыншиева Ж.Б..²
^{1,2} Абай атындағы ҚазҰПУ
¹ 2 курс магистранты
² PhD, аға оқытушы.

ОНЛАЙН ҚҰРАЛДАРДЫ ПАЙДАЛАНУ АРҚЫЛЫ 7-СЫНЫП ОҚУШЫЛАРЫНЫҢ АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІНДЕ СӨЙЛЕУ ЖӘНЕ ТЫҢДАЛЫМ ДАҒДЫЛАРЫН ДАМУ

Аңдатпа

Бұл зерттеу ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде үйренетін 7-сынып оқушыларының сөйлеу және тыңдалым дағдыларын дамыту мақсатында онлайн ресурстарды қалай пайдаланатынын зерттеуге арналған. Зерттеу барысында оқу процесі бақылауға алынып, Microsoft Teams, Mentimeter, BBC Learning English, Quizizz және подкасттар сияқты онлайн платформалардың оқушыларға тілдік дағдыларды нақты оқу жағдайында қолдануға қалай көмектесетіні талданды. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, цифрлық ресурстар оқушыларға шынайы тілдік ортада сөйлеу тәжірибесін арттыруға мүмкіндік беріп, олардың коммуникативтік қабілеттерін дамытуға ықпал етеді. Дәстүрлі әдістермен салыстырғанда, оқушылар цифрлық сөйлеу және тыңдалым тапсырмаларына қатысқанда көбірек қызығушылық пен белсенділік танытты. Алайда, интернеттің тұрақсыздығы мен тіл деңгейлерінің әртүрлілігі сияқты қиындықтар да байқалды. Зерттеу онлайн платформаларды тиімді пайдалану үшін мұғалім тарапынан қолдау мен бағыт-бағдар берудің маңыздылығын атап көрсетеді.

Кілт сөздер: сөйлеу дағдылары, тыңдалым дағдылары, онлайн құралдар, цифрлық білім беру, сабақтағы бақылау, шет тілін оқыту, коммуникативтік құзыреттілік.

Бексултанова Д.Р.¹, Жауынишева Ж.Б.²

^{1 2} КазНПУ им.Абая

¹ Магистрант 2 курса

² PhD, ст.преподаватель

РАЗВИТИЕ НАВЫКОВ ГОВОРЕНИЯ И АУДИРОВАНИЯ У УЧАЩИХСЯ 7 КЛАССА, ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК КАК ИНОСТРАННЫЙ, С ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕМ ОНЛАЙН-ИНСТРУМЕНТОВ

Аннотация

Данное исследование посвящено изучению того, как учащиеся 7 класса, изучающие английский язык как иностранный, используют онлайн-ресурсы для развития навыков говорения и аудирования. В рамках исследования наблюдались учебные занятия, особое внимание уделялось тому, как такие платформы, как Microsoft Teams, Mentimeter, BBC Learning English, Quizizz и подкасты, помогают учащимся практиковать язык в реальной учебной среде. Результаты показали, что цифровые ресурсы предоставляют ценные возможности для устного общения и доступа к подлинной языковой среде, что способствует формированию умений эффективной коммуникации. Ученики проявляли больше энтузиазма и вовлеченности при выполнении цифровых заданий на говорение и аудирование по сравнению с традиционными методами. Вместе с тем отмечены такие проблемы, как нестабильное интернет-соединение и различный уровень владения языком. Исследование подчеркивает важность педагогической поддержки и направляющего участия учителя для максимально эффективного использования онлайн-платформ.

***Ключевые слова:** навыки говорения, навыки аудирования, онлайн-инструменты, цифровое образование, наблюдение на уроке, обучение английскому как иностранному, коммуникативная компетенция.*

Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively through speaking and listening is very important to language learning, as these skills provide the foundation for interaction and comprehension in real-life situations. However, in many traditional classrooms, opportunities for authentic oral practice and exposure to diverse listening input are limited. Digital technologies have begun to change this landscape by offering learners new ways to engage with spoken language in more dynamic and interactive formats.

Recent years have seen the rise of online platforms such as Zoom, Flipgrid, TED-Ed, and podcasts, which provide students with authentic materials and opportunities for communication beyond the classroom walls. These resources not only increase access to native and non-native English input but also allow for more flexible participation, enabling students to practice speaking and listening at their own pace or in collaborative online settings. While numerous studies underline the general benefits of technology in education, fewer have investigated how specific online tools shape the development of communicative competence among younger learners in middle school.

The present study aims to contribute to this discussion by analyzing the classroom use of online platforms to support speaking and listening development in 7th-grade EFL learners. Drawing on observation data, it explores how digital resources influence engagement, comprehension, and teacher-student interaction, while also identifying the challenges that arise in practice.

This article addresses the following research questions:

□ In 7th-grade EFL lessons, how do different online task types synchronous speaking via video-conferencing, asynchronous speaking via recording tools, and interactive listening platforms affect observable learner engagement during class?

□ During online listening activities with authentic multimedia, what comprehension behaviors and difficulties are observed, and how do these differ across tools/activities?

□ What implementation challenges recur during online speaking/listening tasks, and which teacher scaffolds appear most effective at mitigating them in situ?

By examining these questions, the article seeks to clarify how online platforms can complement traditional instruction and provide practical insights for teachers aiming to integrate digital resources into their language classrooms.

Literature review

The integration of online tools into foreign language education has significantly reshaped approaches to teaching speaking and listening. Over the past decade, scholars have investigated how digital platforms not only supplement but also transform communicative practice in EFL contexts. The review of existing studies highlights both the pedagogical opportunities and the challenges associated with implementing online technologies.

One of the most discussed tools is VoiceThread, a cloud-based application designed for collaborative communication. Fadeeva [2017] examined its use in a blended university course on intercultural communication and concluded that VoiceThread effectively enhances both speaking and listening skills by allowing students to record multiple attempts, comment asynchronously, and interact with peers. This flexibility was particularly valuable for learners with psychological barriers, who became more confident in expressing themselves. According to her analysis, VoiceThread encouraged students to plan their speech strategies carefully, listen attentively to peers, and thereby enrich their communicative competence [pp. 19-23]

Beyond individual platforms, the broader challenge of teaching listening and speaking online has been addressed by Lestari [2020], who implemented a semester-long course in Indonesia using Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, and a Moodle-based LMS. Her study emphasized the importance of structuring online lessons into three stages: pre-activities (listening and vocabulary quizzes), whilst-activities (video-based learning for input), and post-activities (recorded role plays and simulations). This design provided balanced exposure to input and output, ensuring that listening supported speaking development. Lestari's findings illustrate that despite the physical separation of students, online environments can replicate authentic communicative practice when carefully scaffolded [pp. 173-175]

The experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic further underline the centrality of pedagogy in online contexts. Kabilan and Annamalai [2022] conducted a phenomenological study of Malaysian university educators and analyzed their practices through the Community of Inquiry framework. They observed that effective online teaching required the integration of teaching presence (design and facilitation), social presence (interaction and collaboration), and cognitive presence (deep learning). Despite technical and organizational difficulties, many educators succeeded in creating meaningful speaking and listening opportunities by fostering collaboration and reflective dialogue [pp. 2-4]. Their study suggests that online tools alone do not guarantee success; teacher mediation and thoughtful design are decisive.

Another line of research highlights the use of mobile instant messaging applications. Annamalai [2019] explored WhatsApp as an extension of blended learning in Malaysia. Students valued the app for its immediacy, accessibility, and potential to sustain language interaction outside the classroom. While some limitations were noted, such as distraction and varying participation, most learners reported that WhatsApp encouraged active communication and provided a flexible environment for practicing language skills informally [pp. 3-5]. This demonstrates that mobile technologies can lower barriers to participation, especially when learners already use them in their daily routines.

Finally, recent studies have examined the potential of authentic online conversations through video conferencing. Tran et al. [2024] implemented an innovative project in Vietnam in which

EFL learners engaged in weekly one-hour conversations with volunteer English speakers worldwide via platforms such as Zoom and Skype. The results showed significant improvement in speaking fluency, listening comprehension, and overall communicative confidence. Importantly, students reported increased motivation and reduced anxiety when communicating with proficient speakers in authentic contexts [pp. 1-3]. This study highlights the unique affordances of synchronous video tools in providing learners with the type of interaction often unavailable in traditional classrooms.

Methodology

This study employed a small-scale experimental observation to investigate how online tools contribute to the development of speaking and listening skills among 7th-grade EFL students. The target group consisted of four participants, each assigned a different type of digital task representing one aspect of communicative competence:

- Student 1: synchronous speaking activity through Microsoft Teams (oral discussion).
- Student 2: asynchronous speaking practice using Mentimeter (recorded responses and peer interaction).
- Student 3: listening comprehension task with authentic input from BBC Learning English.
- Student 4: integrated activity through Quizizz, combining listening and speaking elements in an interactive format.

Data were collected through classroom observation conducted between August 26 and September 11. The focus was on capturing qualitative evidence of learner engagement, challenges encountered, and emotional responses during the activities. Field notes documented three main aspects: (1) willingness to participate, (2) frequency and quality of contributions, and (3) reactions to technical or linguistic difficulties.

The study followed an exploratory design rather than quantitative measurement, aiming to compare learner behaviors across task types and identify patterns in how digital tools influence speaking and listening development. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring voluntary participation and maintaining anonymity in reporting results.

Results

Observations were carried out with four seventh-grade students, each completing a distinct online task designed to develop speaking or listening skills. The results indicate that the choice of platform and task type strongly influenced engagement, confidence, and the quality of learner performance.

Table 4.1: Overview of Observed Online Tasks

Student	Tool & Task	Focus Skill	Observed Engagement	Challenges
				Emotional Response
1	MS Teams - oral discussion on "My daily routine and free time"	Speaking (synchronous)	Actively participated in short exchanges; responded to peers' questions	Occasional hesitation; minor technical delays
2	Mentimeter - monologue "My favorite place in my city"	Speaking (asynchronous)	Carefully prepared sentences; able to record and share responses; interacted by commenting on peers' posts	Initial shyness; difficulty with pronunciation in longer sentences
3	BBC Learning English - "How do babies communicate?" (6 Minute English)	Listening (authentic input)	Focused on main ideas; noted new vocabulary; answered comprehension questions with moderate success	Struggled with speech rate and unfamiliar words
4	Quizizz - quiz "School subjects and hobbies"	Integrated (listening + speaking)	Very engaged; answered quickly; showed strong competitive spirit	Some distraction due to game-like features

The classroom observation revealed that each online tool offered distinct pedagogical affordances in relation to speaking and listening development. The synchronous speaking task conducted via MS Teams encouraged spontaneous interaction and authentic turn-taking, although

some hesitation was evident when learners were required to respond under time pressure. By contrast, the asynchronous task on Mentimeter enabled students to plan, rehearse, and refine their speech, thereby fostering confidence and accuracy, albeit at the expense of immediacy and natural dialogue. The listening activity based on BBC Learning English provided learners with valuable exposure to authentic input and contributed to lexical enrichment, yet the pace of delivery and unfamiliar vocabulary demanded additional teacher scaffolding to ensure comprehension. Finally, the interactive quiz on Quizizz generated high levels of engagement and motivation, with its competitive format sustaining attention, though at times diverting focus from deeper processing of the language. Taken together, these findings underscore that while online tools can substantially enrich the development of communicative competence, their effectiveness is contingent upon careful selection, thoughtful integration, and ongoing teacher mediation to balance benefits with inherent limitations.

Discussion

The observation results confirm that online tools hold considerable promise for supporting the development of speaking and listening skills among 7th-grade students, a finding consistent with earlier research on technology-assisted language learning. The synchronous task on Microsoft Teams demonstrated that real-time video conferencing can create conditions for authentic dialogue and spontaneous responses, echoing the conclusions of Tran et al. [2024], who highlighted the value of synchronous interaction in enhancing communicative confidence. However, the hesitation noted in some learners aligns with Lestari's [2020] reminder that structured scaffolding remains essential when implementing digital oral tasks.

The asynchronous activity on Mentimeter illustrated a different set of advantages. By allowing learners to plan and rehearse their responses, this tool contributed to greater accuracy and confidence, particularly for those who may struggle with anxiety in live discussions. This pattern reflects Fadeeva's [2017] findings on the benefits of asynchronous tools for lowering psychological barriers and enabling more deliberate speech production. At the same time, the reduced immediacy of interaction highlights a limitation, suggesting that asynchronous tools should complement rather than replace synchronous practice.

The BBC Learning English listening activity reinforced the importance of authentic input in EFL contexts, confirming Vandergrift and Goh's [2012] argument that real-world speech enhances both comprehension strategies and vocabulary acquisition. The observed difficulties with speech rate and accent variability, however, reveal the same challenges documented in studies of authentic listening, underlining the teacher's role in providing pre-listening preparation and post-listening support to ensure comprehension.

Finally, the Quizizz task demonstrated the motivational impact of game-based learning environments. Learners engaged actively and responded quickly, reflecting Kukulska-Hulme's [2020] point that interactive technologies can sustain interest and participation. At the same time, the playful, competitive format occasionally drew attention away from deeper language processing, echoing the caution of Kabilan and Annamalai [2022] that technology should be carefully mediated to balance engagement with pedagogical goals.

Taken together, these findings highlight the multifaceted nature of online tools in language instruction: synchronous platforms foster immediacy and fluency, asynchronous modes encourage careful expression, authentic resources expand comprehension, and interactive tools heighten motivation. The study thus reinforces the broader consensus that while digital resources enrich language learning, their effectiveness depends on thoughtful integration and ongoing pedagogical support.

Conclusion

This study has examined the role of online tools in developing the speaking and listening skills of 7th-grade EFL students through classroom observation of four distinct tasks. The findings suggest that different digital platforms provide complementary benefits: synchronous interaction on Microsoft Teams promoted spontaneity and fluency; asynchronous practice on Mentimeter fostered confidence and more careful speech production; authentic listening input from BBC

Learning English enriched comprehension and vocabulary, though it required targeted teacher scaffolding; and the interactive quiz on Quizizz enhanced motivation and participation, albeit with occasional distraction from deeper language processing.

Overall, the results indicate that digital resources can significantly enrich the development of communicative competence, provided they are used thoughtfully and in balance with traditional instruction. The study underscores the importance of the teacher's role as a mediator who integrates tools strategically, supports learners in overcoming linguistic and technical barriers, and ensures that online activities remain aligned with pedagogical objectives. Future research with larger groups and longitudinal designs could provide further insight into the sustained impact of online platforms on language learning outcomes.

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