

Authentic Digital Storytelling as Alternative Teaching Strategy to Develop Speaking Skills in EFL Classes

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Received 24/05/2020	<h3>Abstract</h3>
Received in revised form 13/09/2020	The research study intends to determine the effectiveness of authentic digital storytelling as an alternative strategy to improve speaking in EFL classes at the university level. The research follows a quantitative paradigm, and a survey was first administered to capture participants' perceptions of the everyday speaking activities employed in classes. Most of the participants acknowledged the importance of authentic communicative strategies to improve oral skills; however, in practice, both teachers and students believed that the strategies used in class are not authentic and communicative at all. Based on the survey results, authentic digital storytelling was introduced to determine if it improves students' oral skills, specifically speaking. A pretest and posttest activity was applied using a rubric that assessed the student's sense of organization, quality of language used, mode of delivery, supporting material used, and the central message's quality to determine the effectiveness of using
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digital storytelling as a communicative strategy. The significant findings show that authentic digital storytelling significantly improved students' speaking skills; however, its implementation required teachers' willingness to apply novel communicative strategies inside and outside the classroom.
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1. INTRODUCTION

English is a global language, and it is the role of educators to raise students' awareness about its status in today's world (Crystal, 2009). As a global language, this implies that learning English for communicative purposes is of paramount importance, especially in countries where English is not widely spoken in daily activities. By learning English as a foreign language, people can engage in international commerce, advance in their studies, and participate in scientific activities.

In Ecuador, learning English is perceived as necessary because it allows people to communicate beyond linguistic and geographical boundaries. Learning the language opens opportunities for people to teach in schools, language institutes, and universities; it expands work opportunities in tourism and international trade. It accrues a particular status symbol that reflects the characteristic of a global citizen. In the research conducted by the British Council (2015), almost half of the interviewed language learners emphasized the importance of learning English. They want to learn English to get a better job (45%), and to be able to communicate well (32%), such as talking to native English language speakers (pp. 43-44). Al Asmari (2015) corroborated this assertion by stating that the need to learn English as a foreign language stems from its perceived usefulness in accessing job opportunities and in communicating with other English speakers to achieve social and academic development (p. 976).

In 2017, the Ecuadorian Higher Education Board mandated that undergraduate students must achieve a foreign language proficiency level before enrolling in the last academic year, and before the completion of school credits that are needed for graduation (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2017). The Ecuadorian Organic Law of Higher Education reinforced this regulation by obliging all higher education institutions to

provide language courses to facilitate the achievement of specific foreign language proficiency levels before students graduate (Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior, 2018). In Ecuador, a B2 level based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is the widely accepted norm in higher education (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2017); however, it has been a challenge for institutions to enforce the required level. The difficulty in implementation is due to several factors, such as students' motivation to learn the language, teacher's training, proficiency level, curricular-related challenges, and limited exposure to language use, involving both productive and receptive skills.

Learning a new language involves an added challenge in developing the four skills – reading, listening, writing, and speaking. In most cases, language proficiency is often gauged through the speaker's ability to produce the language by communicating and interacting with other language users. Although writing is another productive skill that signifies an individual's capacity to combine pragmatic and semantic uses of the language at first encounter, it is the individual's ability to speak that enables people to engage in different interaction types.

Studies show that speaking is crucial in demonstrating proficiency in the foreign language, which is key to interaction. Somdee and Suppasetserree (2013) argued that speaking is an essential skill in foreign and second language learning due to its opportunities to learn and practice English for further development. Similarly, UKEssays (2018) considered that speaking skills are the most effective means to increase fluency and correct speech to communicate fluently and effectively. In addition, Somdee and Suppasetserree (2013) stated that it is necessary to develop speaking strategies because it motivates learners to actively participate in the classroom settings.

Developing students' skills and competencies in speaking is crucial in facilitating interaction and communicative abilities. Although the skill and ability to write, listen, and read in a foreign language are equally important, the capacity to speak spontaneously seems to be the apparent indicator of proficiency because it allows people to demonstrate the use of language upfront. An individual's capacity to speak is undoubtedly the conspicuous indicator of command; however, speaking is a very

challenging skill to develop because the ability to be fluent and spontaneous, with grammar accuracy, is a competency that is acquired over time. Moreover, sufficient exposure to the target language is necessary for learners to absorb their pragmatics. Exposure to language through interaction is a challenge in Ecuador due to limited opportunities to engage with English language users in workplaces, universities, schools, and social circles.

Besides limited social spaces to interact with proficient English language users, there is also ineffective speaking in EFL classes. For instance, if teachers are not prepared to provide adequate practices and communicative strategies, learners may feel unmotivated. Somdee and Suppasetserree (2013) believed that there are not enough interesting textbooks and materials in English to encourage learners to study because most textbook activities favor reading and writing skills development, which is more “structure-oriented and formal per se” (p. 166). Insufficient resources make speaking a difficult skill to learn and more challenging to master for some learners. In some schools and universities in Ecuador, teachers do not know how to use technology to make the learning experience more significant. The minimal use of technology, particularly the utilization of information communications technology (ICT), can be attributed to teachers’ inadequately equipped classrooms and poor educational technology skills.

The development of appropriate speaking skills requires the use of meaningful and engaging speaking activities. When communicative activities do not respond to students’ interests, learners may not exert efforts to communicate, which impedes students’ capacity to share and use the language fluently and effectively. In countries where English is taught as a foreign language, it is essential to enhance learners’ speaking skills in classrooms that promote authentic tasks. Real-life simulations and meaningful speaking tasks beyond pure grammatical and formal instructions develop more sociocultural and pragmatic language use. Al Asmari (2015) suggested that teachers’ responsibility is to improve their knowledge, qualifications, and skills through professional development for language teaching and technology in the classroom environment.

Constant professional updating would account for flexible group activities that encourage communication.

In today's globalizing era, ICT tools have proven to be pivotal in providing students with diverse, engaging, and interactive platforms to develop speaking abilities both inside and outside the classroom. Students are provided with a complete set of textbooks and activity books with accompanying CDs in most classes. However, despite having the appropriate supporting materials to facilitate students' interaction and communicative competence, speaking remains a challenge for most teachers, primarily due to students' limited exposure to proficient English language users. In most cases, the only exposure of students to the language is inside the classroom through the teacher's input. Most speaking exercises involve prepared conversations in textbooks, video clips, and repetitive activities that are intended to develop students' familiarity with the language's pace. There seems to be limited opportunities for students to construct their knowledge of English and produce what they learn in their way. Further, the advent of ICTs has permeated every facet of language learning. Still, there seems to be a lack of innovative use of its potential to capitalize on students' interest to facilitate their capability to produce the language through authentic tasks.

Therefore, this research study intends to determine whether using ICT tools through authentic activities improve students' speaking skills. The researchers employed authentic digital storytelling as the intervention activity using students' narratives as outputs where key aspects were analyzed after the intervention. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers and students of alternative communicative strategies?
2. To what extent can authentic digital storytelling contribute to students' speaking skills development?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Digital storytelling refers to the specific mode of spoken production using technology with textual characteristics. Banaszewski (2005) defined digital storytelling as the practice of combining personal stories with multimedia (images, audio, and text) to produce a short movie. Furthermore,

storytelling as an ancient form of communication evolves with each technological development (Balko et al., 2011). Human communication has developed from body language to spoken and written language, and that development continues with today's digital narratives. Burgess (2006) affirmed that digital storytelling is a new and innovative narrative form of communication, with such innovation exemplified by "hypertext fiction that combines images, narrative, voices, and sound" (p. 207).

Similarly, Robin (2016) supported popular definitions of digital storytelling as the art of telling a short story using a mixture of different digital media that includes images, written text, audio, and videos. Additionally, these elements blend into each other using computer-based tools to tell stories that revolve around a specific topic and often contain a point of view of the author. Most of the stories vary in length and last from two to ten minutes in total. These short stories are saved in a format uploaded into the web and viewed on any device that can reproduce video files.

Robin (2016) provided a means of differentiating between an authentic digital story and inauthentic forms. Regardless of the different points of view concerning what is and what is not a digital story, Ohler (2005, as quoted in Robin, 2016) stated that when producing personal or informative narratives, students become active creators instead of passive consumers of media. Digital storytelling empowers students with the ability to communicate effectively. Using multimedia tools allows learners to become more involved in constructing and building their knowledge.

Authenticity in digital storytelling refers to the effective use of ICT tools in developing students' ability to create and perform authentic tasks that revolve around their reality. ICT provides authenticity and increases learners' willingness to learn the target language. It allows students to use images, animation, audio, and video clips to present and practice the language creatively (Alkamel & Chouthaiwale, 2018). Here, students demonstrate the meaningful application of essential language knowledge and technological skills. These tasks allow students to take advantage of storytelling elements, such as audio, video, and text, to create digital narratives that reflect students' personal choices and experiences. Learners produce their narratives through speaking activities that involve

the acquisition of essential knowledge and communicative competence through the incorporation of higher-order/critical thinking opportunities. In this manner, utilizing this format promotes authenticity in student narratives (Jacomard & Kuuse, 2016). In this research project, learners develop personal and informative narratives using authentic digital storytelling as an alternative strategy to enhance their speaking skills.

Previous studies have proven digital storytelling as an effective strategy in improving students' teaching and learning process. McElfresh (2011) emphasized the usage of digital storytelling to express the need for language learners to share their stories and suggested that this process can help students acquire new vocabulary words. Through this study, the author discovered that learners grew as writers, improved their productive skills, and produced outputs that served as evidence of the achievement of learning outcomes (McElfresh, 2011). In a similar study, Alismail (2015) explored the value of digital storytelling in developing a student's ability to synthesize, analyze, evaluate, and present information in an organized way as well as the development of knowledge and academic skills. By creating a story as a demonstration of the acquired information and the application of skills, learners construct content that turns into information and, eventually, into knowledge. Digital storytelling also helps learners to gain familiarity with an alternative communicative strategy that can improve speaking skills in the target language. McElfresh (2011) and Alismail (2015) emphasized the value of digital storytelling as a technological tool, and Somdee and Suppasetsee (2013) supported their assertions particularly on the role of digital storytelling as a technological aid in education as students are learning to use technology in education. The implementation of information communication technology (ICT), in the form of digital narratives, in foreign/second language classes increases students' motivation and helps them develop lifelong learning skills while enabling interaction with native speakers through the use of language for real purposes and in real situations (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). In other words, digital storytelling combines computer technologies and the ability to tell and produce stories while motivating learners to use higher-order thinking skills when learning a foreign language. Moreover, it has helped learners improve productive academic skills in writing and speaking by

teaching them how to collect data, convert it into information, and change it (Alismail, 2015).

Digital storytelling can accordingly become an alternative communicative strategy that builds on student's baseline knowledge. A constructivist learning environment does not only encourage and accepts students' autonomy (ICT authentic narratives), but it also facilitates language learning by giving students choices and providing them with language practice that is meaningful and interesting (Torres, 2017). Digital storytelling enables learners to use authentic narratives, where students construct their understanding and knowledge of the world, which renders a constructivist orientation. It allows learners to experience unexpected scenarios in the learning process and reflect upon themselves. Torres (2017) stated that the teaching and learning process results from both teacher and learners' interaction, including conscious and unconscious processes. This interaction means that a new language's teaching and learning process is controlled and determined partially by the learner and its exposure to comprehensible input. Educational instruction influences the teacher's input, and this is where authentic activities like digital storytelling prove to be innovative.

The purpose of digital storytelling, particularly personal narratives, is to provide learners with the necessary alternative strategies to help them become architects of their knowledge, autonomously and independently. Students should not only be receivers but producers of their learning while reflecting on how and why they learn a new language (Torres, 2017).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The participants in this research study were sixteen teachers and fifty EFL students in each group, respectively. The first group of participants was EFL teachers who had from 2 to 8 years of teaching experience in higher education and fulfilled all academic and professional requirements to work as English instructors. Six male and ten female EFL teachers were asked to

voluntarily take a teacher's survey to determine whether they use alternative communication strategies in teaching.

The second group of participants for the research study was second-year undergraduate students. They had to learn English as a foreign language as part of their requirement to complete undergraduate programs. The participants had previous experience with the language as beginner language users, corresponding to levels A1, A2, and intermediate language users, which corresponds with level B1 based on the common European framework for languages (CEFR). Ecuadorian students are required to reach a B2 English language level within three years or during six semesters. Afterward, students are expected to take a TOEFL internet-based test (iBT) to get a B2 level certification. This test is optional but highly encouraged in the Ecuadorian EFL context.

Fifty students, twenty-three male and twenty-seven female Ecuadorian students, were purposely selected for the research study. A survey was administered to students who expressed their interest in participating. After the survey, students participated in the pretest-posttest activity. Students from English language courses "A" and "B" chose a favorite book and prepared a class presentation following a traditional method to present a book report. Upon the completion of the presentations, the same two groups performed the alternative strategy – digital storytelling. The groups have the same English language proficiency level since they had already taken the B1 exit level test. The study used the quasi-experimental design without a control group intervention; thus, there was no need for a sample. The study was done in the classroom setting in a one-group pretest-posttest design. The whole population (N=50) conventional teaching method and fifty using authentic digital storytelling served as the total number of respondents in the study.

3.2 Research design

The study used a quantitative approach in two phases: the survey administration and the application of a quasi-experimental method. In the first phase, a validated survey was administered to teachers and students to determine the general methods teachers used in teaching speaking

skills and the activities students were exposed to in developing this type of productive skill. The survey was applied to determine whether digital storytelling was widely employed or not in developing speaking and oral communication skills in English classes. Tables of frequencies and percentages from respondents' answers were analyzed to establish the extent to which communicative strategies were or were not used. Three experts in the field of education validated the survey's questionnaires. Once the surveys were validated, the results from teachers' and students' surveys were analyzed to determine the survey's reliability and avoid bias due to external factors. The results were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient test, where a high level of reliability was evident since the results reached a 0.9 over 1.0, considered highly acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003).

The second phase following the survey was the administration of a quasi-experimental method to determine the effect of authentic digital storytelling on students' speaking skills. In this stage, the groups performed the same book presentation task using digital storytelling for the posttest assignment. To establish the strength of the relationship between the variables, authentic digital storytelling (cause), and English speaking skill (effect), a comparative analysis of results was used to establish the relationship between the variables and show how an approximate assumption was deduced from the results.

In comparing the pretest and posttest results, the influence of authentic digital storytelling (cause) on the English speaking skill (effect) was compared using a computer software program for statistical analysis. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test verified the hypothesis and analyzed the results of the pretest and posttest speaking tasks. A level of error of significance of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) served as the tolerable level in determining the variance between the two variables.

The last part of the research method was using an oral communication rubric to determine whether the participants found authentic digital storytelling helpful or not and decided whether it had helped students improve their speaking skills. The total rubric score was over 10 points, and it was adapted to the grading system at the language center on a 10/10 scale. The parameters established in the rubric were five

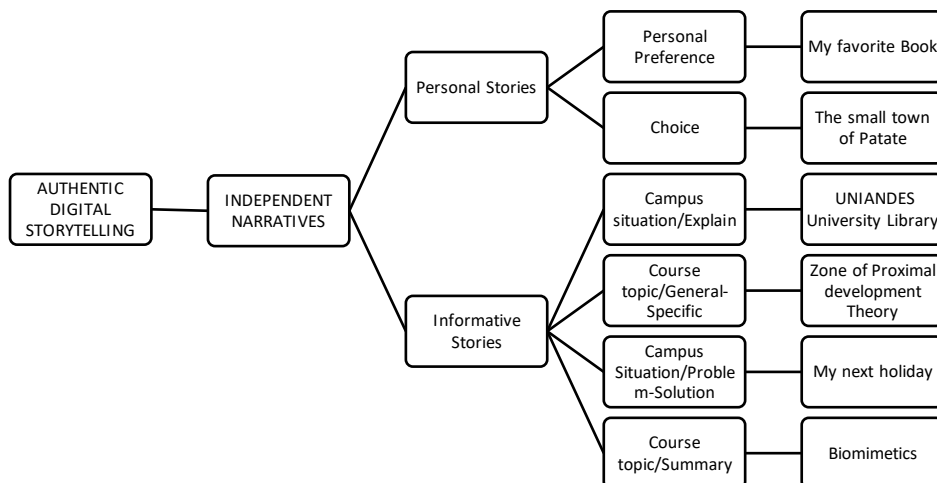
in total, and it included organization, language, delivery techniques, supporting materials, and central message. These parameters are stated in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2009) to evaluate oral communication. The 2.0 points score was the maximum score in each parameter, and a score of 0.5 was considered a low performance for each evaluation criterion.

3.3 Data collection strategies

The study gathered quantitative data in two phases. First, a survey was administered to determine authentic digital storytelling as an alternative strategy to develop English speaking skills. Frequencies and percentages of answers described the answers of respondents. Second, the analysis of pretest results (traditional method) and posttest results (communicative strategy) led to hypothesis verification through the testing of the treatment (authentic digital storytelling) applied to students using a one-group pretest and posttest approach. Data collection was done through classroom visits during one month (March to April) with the collaboration of two EFL language center instructors from each group.

The implementation of authentic digital storytelling followed in the second phase (testing of the treatment) to determine its effects on students' speaking skills. A lesson plan was developed for the posttest following the same parameters used in the pretest activity. The lesson plan presentation for the posttest included a small workshop where students from both classes were introduced to Windows Moviemaker and KineMaster as computer-based tools to be used in the production and creation of their authentic digital stories for the posttest. Students uploaded their videos to the researcher's personal YouTube account. The videos were compiled in a private file to protect participants' identities. When all authentic digital stories were uploaded, evaluation followed. The lesson included designing an instructional guide for authentic digital storytelling based on the instructional material used at the university and the TOEFL iBT Speaking test guidelines. Figure 1 shows the Guidelines that students followed in creating their authentic digital stories for the posttest.

Figure 1

Authentic Digital Storytelling (ADS) Guideline

Note. Representation of a proposal for authentic digital storytelling speaking activities based on the TOEFL iBT guidelines for the speaking practice test using personal and informative independent digital narrative stories.

The instructional guideline included a lesson plan with an introduction, purpose, objectives, and procedures for the activity and an example of authentic digital storytelling that could guide the completion of the speaking activity. Furthermore, a presentation of software programs that shows how to create original digital storytelling followed. It included the estimated time for the execution of the task and the oral communication rubric of evaluation and assessment for each of the authentic digital storytelling activities presented and developed for each unit.

3.4 Instrumentation for data collection

The administration of a 10-item teacher's and student's survey using a 5-level Likert scale showed data that refers to the methods and techniques teachers generally employ to develop speaking skills in EFL classes, and it captured the activities students are exposed to in the development of

productive skills. The study used the Cronbach Alpha coefficient test to measure internal validity. The 95% level of reliability with a typical error of 5% and an error of significance of 0.05% established the validity level. Furthermore, the use of the Oral Communication VALUE rubric showed the results that were compared in the pretest-posttest activities. These results were contrasted against a set of parameters including organization, language, delivery techniques, supporting materials, and central message. In addition, the scoring criteria comprised a score of 2.0 for capstone level of performance, 1.5 and 1.0 for milestone levels of performance, and 0.5 for the benchmark level of performance respectively.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey administered to teachers brought to the fore their perception about communicative language teaching (CLT). To a certain extent, their perceptions of CLT reflected their understanding and regard for this approach in teaching English as a foreign language. The kind of perceptions that surveyed teachers have towards CLT is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Teacher's Perceived Value of Communicative Language Teaching

Items	M (SD)	Always	Almost Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
		(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
1. Considers the development of oral expression as fundamental for communicative purposes in real situations.	4.75 (0.447)	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
2. Use of oral communication activities over correct use of grammar in English.	2.19 (1.424)	12.50%	6.25%	12.50%	25%	43.75%

3. Setting of objectives, theme and purpose to develop oral communicative activities.	2.56 (0.964)	6.25%	12.50%	12.50%	68.75%	0%
4. Establish procedures on oral presentations in English.	2.69 (1.014)	6.25%	18.75%	12.50%	62.50%	0%

Note. Percentages are derived from the raw data collected from the teacher's survey results using a Likert scale stated as (5) always, (4) almost always, (3) sometimes, (2) rarely, and (1) never. Furthermore, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values serve as evidence for statistical analysis.

Based on Table 1, 75% of the teachers always consider the development of oral expression as fundamental for communicative purposes, and no participant finds it irrelevant. There is not much variation in items 1 and 3, and this implies that teachers' responses are generally the same. Teachers' share the same view on the usage of oral expressions as key in developing communicative competence. The high regard placed on the importance of oral expressions is reinforced in item 3, where most teachers believe that setting objectives, themes and purposes that develop oral skills is the first step a teacher must do to develop communicative competence in speaking. However, the use of oral activities and the formulation of procedures that facilitate the actualization of these oral activities in EFL classrooms show contrary results and manifest wide variation in relation to the average. Only 12.50% of the teachers always use oral communicative activities, and 43.75% have never used it. The percentages in the first two items imply that although teachers consider the importance of using oral communicative activities to develop oral expressions, they do not necessarily apply and implement oral activities in their classes. As corroborated by teachers in the survey, developing speaking skills increases fluency and correct speech to communicate fluently and effectively inside and outside the classroom setting (Al Asmari, 2015). In terms of goal setting and objective formulation, 68.75% of the teachers rarely set objectives, theme, and purpose in their oral communicative activities. More than half, or 62.50%,

rarely establish procedures in oral presentations. While teachers are aware of the value in developing students' oral skills, in practice, they rarely establish the procedures, set the objectives, and implement oral communicative activities whose aim is to develop speaking skills. Thus, in theory, teachers acknowledge the value of oral expressions for communicative purposes, such as speaking. Still, they do not put into practice the enabling mechanisms that are pivotal in developing oral skills. Therefore, it is necessary to develop speaking strategies to motivate learners to participate in classroom activities (Harmer, 1984, as cited in Somdee & Suppasetserree, 2013), because these strategies allow students to answer questions, share ideas, and make presentations. Table 2 shows the list of communicative strategies that teachers believe they employ in their class to develop students' speaking ability.

Table 2

List of Oral Communicative Strategies Teachers Use

Items	M (SD)	Always	Almost Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
		(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
1. Use of audio, video, and images	2.88 (1.088)	12.50%	12.50%	25%	50%	0%
2. Implementation of interactive activities	2.75 (1.238)	18.75%	6.25%	6.25%	68.75%	0%
3. Utilization of web-based tools	2.44 (0.629)	0%	6.25%	31.25%	62.50%	0%
4. Out-of-the book speaking activities	2.94 (1.237)	18.75%	12.50%	12.50%	56.25%	0%
5. Recording and listening to own audios	1.69 (0.873)	0%	6.25%	6.25%	37.50%	50%
6. Use of rubric to assess speaking	2.69 (1.014)	6.25%	18.75%	12.50%	62.50%	0%

Note. Percentages are derived from the raw data collected through teacher's surveys using a Likert scale stated as (5) always, (4) almost always, (3) sometimes, (2) rarely, and (1) never. Furthermore, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values serve as evidence for statistical analysis.

In developing oral communicative strategies, 18.75% of the teachers always use interactive activities that allow students to talk and interact with each other, followed by audio, video, images, and interactive activities (12.50%). Teachers never initiated the recording of students' voices (50%), and 62.50% rarely use web-based tools and rubrics to assess students during speaking exercises. The low percentage of recording students' voices implies that teachers have rarely used communicative activities and authentic digital tools despite their high regard of communicative activities in developing students' speaking skills. The SD values of items 3 and 5 do not show much variation. Most teachers rarely utilize web-based tools and they seldom asked students to record themselves and listen to their audios. Despite teachers' high regard on the potential of ICT to develop learning effectively, particularly the development of speaking skills, teachers themselves rarely initiate or implement the usage of ICT tools. The non-utilization of these ICT tools can be attributed to lack of knowledge of its use, unfamiliarity of the features, or apprehension of what these tools can do to student's learning.

Prapphal (2003, as cited in Somdee & Suppasetserree, 2013) stressed the importance of technology to help students develop communicative skills and achieve proficiency. Implementing innovative speaking activities, technology, and web-based projects into teachers' supplementary practices enhances English speaking skills through experiential and meaningful exercises. In items 2 and 4, there is variation in teachers' answers. Teachers' utilization of interactive activities and out-of-the book speaking activities vary – some teachers always use these activities, and more than 50% almost never attempt to introduce them in their classrooms.

The same survey items were administered to students to determine their perceptions of using communicative strategies to develop their speaking skills. Table 3 shows students' perceptions of the value of these strategies.

Table 3*Student's Perceived Value of Oral Communicative Activities*

Items	M (SD)	Always	Almost Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
		(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
1. Considers the development of oral expression as fundamental for communicative purposes in real situations.	4.68 (0.587)	74%	20%	6%	0%	0%
2. Use of oral communication activities over correct use of grammar in English.	2.72 (1.230)	12%	12%	28%	32%	16%
3. Setting of objectives, theme and purpose to develop oral communicative activities.	2.54 (1.164)	14%	0%	24%	50%	12%
4. Establish procedures on oral presentations in English.	2.26 (1.006)	4%	12%	6%	62%	16%

Note. Percentages are derived from the raw data collected through students' surveys using a Likert scale stated as (5) always, (4) almost always, (3) sometimes, (2) rarely, and (1) never. Furthermore, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values serve as evidence for statistical analysis.

The majority (74%) of students consider and regard oral expressions as key in developing communicative competence, and students share a common view as variation is not evident in the responses. However, in other items, variation is evident in students' responses. The variation can be attributed to many factors such as diverse students' experiences in their EFL classes, and different opinions about how teachers implement interactive activities. It is noteworthy that most students rarely experience seeing teachers set objectives and establish procedures in their

oral presentations and communicative activities. More than a quarter or 28% of the students attest that their teachers privilege the use of oral communication activities over the correct use of grammar. Most of the students have noticed that their teachers rarely, and some have never, used oral communication activities. Half of the students or 50% are rarely informed about the objectives, the theme, and the purpose of an oral activity before classes start. More than half or 62% are not aware of any procedures established before their oral presentations.

Table 4 presents students' perception in percentage as to what oral communicative activities teachers use in their classrooms.

Table 4

List of Communicative Activities Identified by Students

Items	M (SD)	Always	Almost Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
		(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
1. Use of audio, video, and images	2.42 (1.214)	6%	16%	18%	34%	26%
2. Implementation of interactive activities	3.78 (0.932)	30%	22%	44%	4%	0%
3. Utilization of web-based tools	2.70 (1.249)	18%	0%	28%	42%	12%
4. Out-of-the book speaking activities	2.72 (1.278)	16%	8%	22%	40%	14%
5. Recording and listening to own audios	2.62 (1.276)	14%	10%	16%	44%	16%
6. Use of rubric to assess speaking	2.38 (1.354)	16%	6%	2%	52%	24%

Note. Percentages are derived from the raw data collected through students' surveys using a Likert scale stated as (5) always, (4) almost always, (3) sometimes, (2) rarely, and (1) never. Furthermore, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values serve as evidence for statistical analysis.

Based on the results, students identify interactive activities (30%) and web-based tools (18%) as some of the communicative techniques teachers use to develop their speaking skills. The other activities in Table 4 have less than 20%, which means teachers do not often use this type of activity in their classrooms. Furthermore, teachers rarely use rubrics (52%) in assessing their outputs, and almost half of them have rarely used ICT tools such as audios (44%), web-based tools (42%), and activities that are not from the book (40%). Punthumasen (2007) argued that textbooks and materials are not interesting enough and discourage learners from studying since most activities favor reading and writing tasks, which are structural and formal per se (Somdee & Suppasetserree, 2013). Despite the advent of ICT tools in today's globalizing era, most teachers have rarely used these tools to develop and promote oral communicative exercises. In almost all items, students' responses show wide variation. Some have experience activities most of the time, but the majority have rarely experienced the use of interactive activities and resources in their EFL classes. In item 2, students share a common experience that their exposure to interactive activities is minimal.

The results of the survey administered to students and teachers by the researcher show similarities. Teachers and students view communicative strategies as strategic in developing students' oral skills; however, students rarely see teachers employ communicative strategies. Similarly, teachers admit that despite the importance of promoting communicative strategies, they have not capitalized on using teaching materials that are authentic, ICT-based, and interactive. These findings confirm the minimal use and, if not, the absence of communicative and authentic activities in developing oral skills. The survey results provided the impetus to test authentic digital storytelling based on the hypothesis that it improves students' speaking skills.

The conduct of a pretest and posttest activity intends to determine whether authentic digital storytelling enhanced the speaking skills of fourth level English language learners. The pretest (traditional method) and posttest (treatment) were graded and compared in terms of organization, language usage, delivery, supporting materials, and central message used in the oral communication rubric. Cameron (2001, as cited

in Puma, 2016) stated that producing oral skills is a demanding task that a learner has to overcome by using vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation that need to be transmitted with fluency.

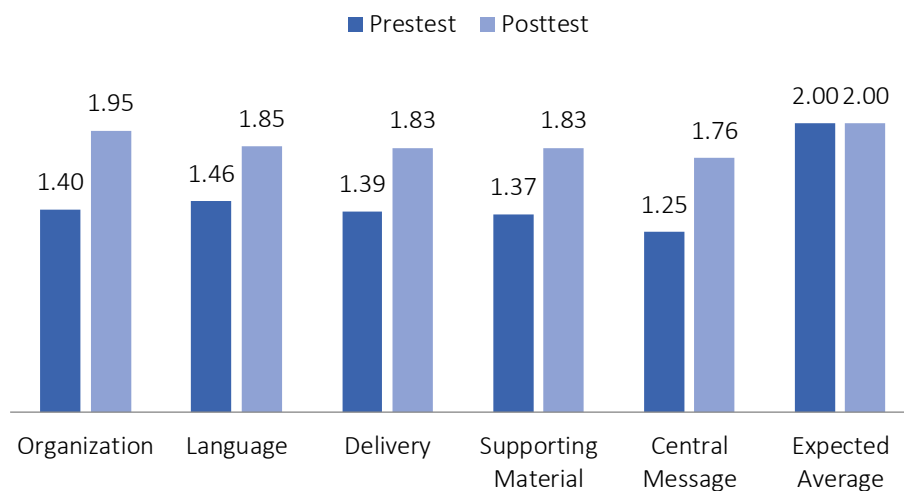
The Wilcoxon Test with 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) level of significance verifies the pretest and posttest results and the mean of two correlated samples. For hypothesis verification, a Wilcoxon signed-rank and non-parametric test were applied to compare the pretest and posttest with a mean range of 25.50, a negative $-z$ value, and a signed-rank of 0.00. A value lower than 0.05 indicates the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

4.1 Pretest-posttest contrastive analysis of results

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2009), oral communication is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, foster understanding, and promote change in listeners' attitudes, values, and beliefs. The oral communication parameters are used in individual live or video-recorded presentations as observed in the pretest and posttest activities by using the suggested oral communication VALUE rubric.

Figure 2 shows the contrastive analysis of the results of students' performance in the pretest (traditional method) and posttest on the use of authentic digital storytelling. Learners' communicative organization pattern improved from 1.40 in the pretest (traditional method) to 1.95 in the posttest after introducing authentic digital storytelling. The use of vocabulary, terminology, and sentence structure increased from 1.46 to 1.85, and delivery techniques to enhance effective communication using learners' voices without fillers improved from 1.39 to 1.83, respectively. Another parameter that showed an increase from 1.37 to 1.83 was supporting materials such as explanations, examples, and illustrations. Finally, learners' capacity to identify the central message (main point, thesis, and purpose) improved from 1.25 in the pretest to 1.76 in the posttest. Students' results were better in the posttest after introducing authentic digital storytelling as an alternative communicative strategy to improve speaking skills. Digital storytelling is a powerful technological aid

Figure 2

Contrastive Analysis of Pretest-posttest Results

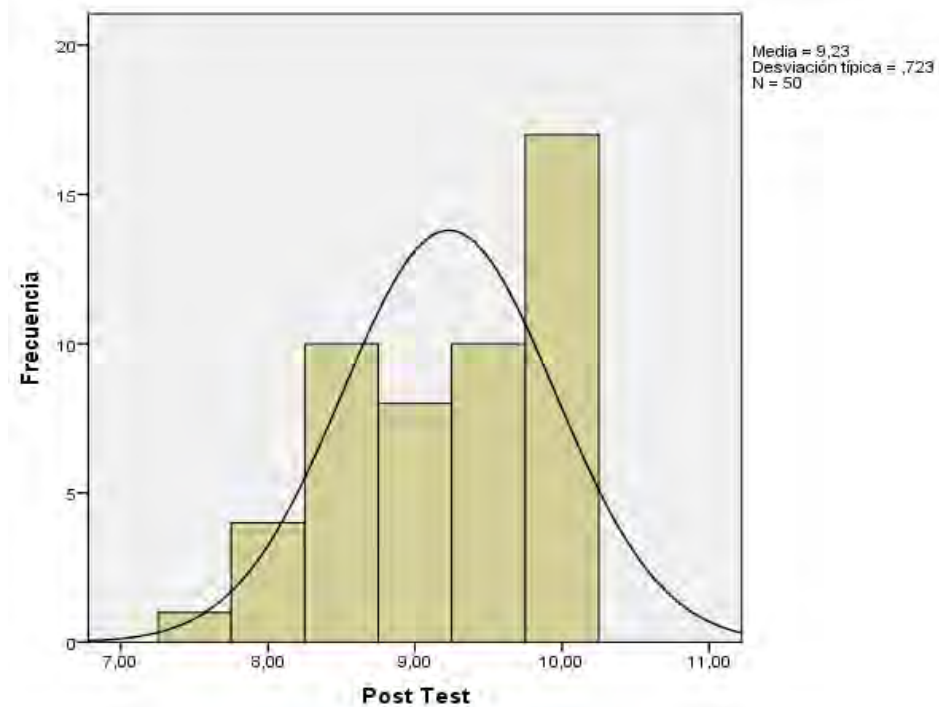
Note. Comparison between means gathered after tabulating the scores every student received individually in the pretest and posttest activity for each performance descriptor, as stated in the oral communication VALUE rubric and its improvement to the expected average.

in education, as observed in this research study. In other words, digital storytelling combines computer technologies with the ability to tell and produce stories while increasing students' motivation and the development of higher-order thinking skills when learning a foreign language (Somdee & Suppasetseree, 2013).

The hypothesis verification histogram is presented in Figure 3 to show the significant difference between pretest and posttest results.

As shown in the histogram, digital storytelling improved speaking skills when applied to fourth level English language students. Two factors could have contributed to its effectiveness. First, authentic product-based outputs are meaningful and relevant to students when learning a foreign language. Rogers (2001, as cited in Al Asmari, 2015) explained that this approach to language teaching highlights the efficacy of the language's communicative properties due to the use of authentic, real-life situations

Figure 3

Hypothesis Verification Histogram

Note. With a significance level of 0.05, the frequency histogram shows a mean of 9.23 and a typical standard deviation of 0.723. The results from the Wilcoxon Test of two correlated samples are 0.00 and lower than 0.05.

and meaningful tasks. These properties go beyond pure grammar and discourse elements in communication. The use of authentic materials in classroom settings facilitates the expression of language use in different scenarios. Using authentic activities allow learners to use baseline knowledge in producing language.

The other factor contributing to the effectiveness of authentic digital storytelling is its form – digital and ICT-based. In this research study, students used personal narratives to develop their digital storytelling task. Students scored higher in the parameters of organization and central message when assessed after the posttest due to the output's nature. The use of ICT-based tools allowed students to self-assess through repetition

of words and pronunciation using their mobile phones. In ordinary communicative strategies that dominate most EFL classrooms in Ecuador, recorded audios and accompanying CDs render students passive as they just receive the input, but they do not produce it using their resources and in their ways.

Rance-Roney (2008) reaffirmed the potent force of digital storytelling as a useful tool for language learning. It is attributed to how the output is embedded into an appropriate language-enriched curriculum, where students can acquire new vocabulary and reinforce language structures. The production of a digital story is not the goal, but that it serves as a tool for students to produce and practice language and demonstrate what they can do with it; thus, increasing the level of a foreign language acquisition process through meaningful spoken practices (Rance-Roney, 2008).

In the month-long implementation of digital storytelling activities in the classrooms, students had the opportunity to write a short narrative, speak, and record a story using their narrative voice. Students highlighted the central message of their output. The central message was clear to the teacher and classmates who served as their audience. The marked difference in delivery, which increased from 1.39 during the pretest to 1.83 during the posttest, was another evidence that points to the strategy's effectiveness. The improvement in students' delivery and English use is attributed to the nature of doing authentic digital storytelling where the process is not linear. Students have the opportunity to revise the script, edit images, change background music, and re-record their voices. The ability to modify output allowed learners to practice the spoken language by asking for help in pronunciation, stress, or intonation patterns in certain individual words or merely repeating complete sentences. Students put their speaking skills to practice until it almost achieved perfection. Repetition and practice allowed learners to use their reality in authentic ways; thus, overcoming minor speaking mistakes in the process.

Somdee and Suppasetseree's (2013) research study's results on the field of ICT and the development of English speaking skills entitled, "Developing English Speaking Skills of Thai Undergraduate Students by Digital Storytelling through Websites," provided valuable information used

as a reference for the upholding of the present research study's results on the effect of implementing "Authentic Digital Storytelling as an Alternative Strategy to Develop English Speaking Skills" in the EFL Ecuadorian context. However, neither of these two research studies is conclusive because EFL contexts can vary from one country to another, where English is taught as a foreign language.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, almost half of the respondents reported that they have rarely used web-based software programs that allow them to record and listen to their voices, including audio, video, and text, to enhance their speaking skills. Thus, using technology through authentic digital storytelling should be incorporated into teachers' teaching strategies because it is paramount to students' oral skills development. Teachers are not always equipped to implement technological resources that help students become aware of their weaknesses and what they can do better within their speaking production. English teachers and students should recognize the importance of developing oral skills, particularly speaking for communication purposes, both inside and outside the classroom. Yet teachers still do not always use authentic activities to promote oral skills as alternative communicative strategies. Most of the speaking tasks used by teachers do not allow students to combine audio, video, and images since thirty students and eight teachers stated that this rarely or never happens in their teaching and learning practices.

Finally, students' speaking skills increase significantly when authentic digital storytelling is implemented as an alternative communicative strategy. Based on the established parameters, the tested variables correlated positively, which implies that speaking skills improved with authentic digital storytelling.

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