

## ENHANCING INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH DIGITAL STORYTELLING BASED ON LOCAL FOLKTALES

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### Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of enhancing the speaking skills of Indonesian university students through digital storytelling grounded in local folktales. A case study using a descriptive approach was employed. The subject of this study was eight first-year students majoring in English training and education at Universitas Bumi Persada. The information was gathered by observing the lecturer who integrated both digital storytelling and local folktales into her instruction in the classroom. To gain more comprehensive data and in-depth information, students were also interviewed regarding their experiences and opinions. The study explores the integration of digital storytelling techniques with traditional local folktales to foster speaking proficiency among EFL students. The research intends to provide significant insights into creative language teaching methodologies by leveraging technology and local culture. The findings show that digital storytelling has a considerable impact on students' speaking ability, providing light on the possibilities of adding culturally rich narratives into language teaching. This study adds to the pedagogical discourse by highlighting the potential of digital storytelling as a catalyst for enhancing speaking abilities, particularly among EFL university students in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Speaking skill; Digital storytelling; Local folktales; Technology in education; Integrating local culture into teaching*

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, studies on students' spoken language interaction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses have been conducted (Ho, 2020; Huang, 2021). These studies have demonstrated the value of this field of study in assisting students in improving their linguistic

competence and communication abilities in general. Thus, when analyzing various parts of the teaching and learning process, the dynamics of spoken language interchange should also be taken into account (Haselow, 2021).

Based on the researchers' preliminary observation, many Indonesian university students who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL) continue to have difficulty speaking. Studies also suggested that such learners suffer from speaking anxiety and communication apprehension due to perceived lack of communication skills (Subekti, 2018, 2020b). As a result, it is imperative to improve their oral communication skills with a focus on their ability to be engaging and productive. There is currently a lack of research on effective approaches and linguistic components that help promote spoken language proficiency, particularly for Indonesian students in EFL settings (Shi & Lei, 2021; Vonkova et al., 2021). This is especially true for students who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

It has been established that using a task-oriented approach is an effective technique to improve spoken language use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses (Subekti, 2020a). The classroom activities within the approach have been shown to increase students' interest in and dedication to their work (Chen & Kent, 2020). They are essential for encouraging speaking actively. The development of oral interaction depends on linguistic components such as rhythm, intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and communication strategies like cooperation, and negotiation (Liu & Kinginger, 2021).

According to Afshar (2021), a task-based approach to education emphasizes the development of communication skills through real-life tasks. This strategy transforms traditional language exercises into meaningful learning experiences that encourage active student participation. In-class interactions are critical for improving students' understanding of the subject (Moser et al., 2022). Participating actively in these tasks not only increases their learning results but also sparks their interest in the subject. Scholars therefore recommend a task-based approach to improve students' spoken language skills (Sun et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

Several studies have shown that the Task-Based approach is beneficial in English language instruction, notably in improving speaking abilities. Thus, the focus of this study is on TBL based on digital storytelling. Digital storytelling assignments are innovative learning models that incorporate technology into the learning process to increase students' willingness to communicate. Students are driven to utilize English actively using digital storytelling-based Task-Based Learning (TBL) since they are needed to participate in discussions and negotiations within study groups to complete collaborative tasks (Poonpon, 2011). Students often become conscious of their abilities in such scenarios, boosting their confidence and ultimately improving their spoken English skills in real-life situations.

In this study, the digital storytelling assignment was carried out in several stages adapted from the study of Wahyuni et al. (2018). First, students began by writing scripts to enhance their linguistic and critical thinking skills. Students were then required to record their writings in audio format to practice pronunciation, intonation, and emphasis. Following that, students captured photographs or recorded videos and then edited the audio, images, and videos in a synchronized fashion. Students worked together to improve their visualization skills as well as their technology literacy through this practice. They were eventually required to present their video

compositions in front of the class at the end of the process, and these videos were subsequently uploaded to the department's and students' social media accounts.

Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that English language instruction should be adjusted to local environmental conditions by adding local wisdom values (Kurniawati & Malasari, 2022, Ninawati & Wahyuni, 2020; Prayudha, 2023). Folktales, regional songs, rhymes, and other forms of cultural diversity that embody local knowledge values are frequently offered. However, there is a shortage of English language teaching materials that incorporate local topics (Banaruee et al., 2023). The materials offered tend to be global. For example, in talks regarding descriptive texts of tourist attractions, the Eiffel Tower in France and the Great Wall of China are frequently mentioned. In this case, teachers could encourage students to research or write about tourist attractions in their area, such as the Islamic Center Lhokseumawe, Ujong Blang Beach, Japanese Caves, and others. This approach to English language instruction might help students absorb the material more quickly because the subjects presented are something common and relevant to their daily lives.

Based on the aforesaid idea, the local wisdom values to be implemented in this research are Aceh folktales. Students are instructed to research various Acehnese folktales that are relevant to their context. After the students have discussed and selected one Acehnese folktale to focus on for their assignment, they will construct a digital story-telling video.

This study aims to fill a significant gap in the literature by incorporating digital storytelling and local cultural assignments into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The goal is to help Indonesian students improve their linguistic abilities in the areas of productive spoken English. The study adds to the body of knowledge by finding effective strategies and linguistic characteristics that help improve Indonesian students' spoken English ability in EFL classrooms. This is accomplished by investigating students' experiences, observing students' oral language interactions, and conducting a reflective analysis of video recordings, which are vital in oral language instruction. Also, this study provides practical implications for educators wishing to improve their students' overall oral ability in English by identifying successful strategies and linguistic elements for improving students' spoken language competency through a task-based approach. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on Indonesian students adds a fresh viewpoint to the current research on a spoken language exchange in EFL classrooms.

To provide clear guidance in achieving the goals of this study, the research questions are formulated as follows: 1) What effect does incorporating digital storytelling into EFL classrooms have on the interaction skill of Indonesian students in spoken English?; 2) How does incorporating local culture into EFL lessons assist Indonesian students in developing speaking skills?

## **METHODS**

This study used a case study as its research design and a qualitative method as its research approach. A case study was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain a thorough insight into the unique case or phenomenon. As Hamied (2017) underlined, this strategy entails a thorough and complete inquiry that allows for the collection of data over time within a real-life environment.

The data was gathered through classroom observations conducted over four sessions (each session was 120 minutes) in a class of eight students studying Basic Speaking. The sample

was chosen on purpose since first-semester students needed to acquire basic storytelling elements and expressions. Besides, the students participating in this study come from rural areas, in which they come from low to middle-income families and lack exposure towards English learning before their admission to the university. Therefore, it can be said that the sample of this study is still at the beginning level of English.

The observation focused on how digital storytelling and local culture integration were applied in the classroom, students' reactions to the lessons, and the difficulties that students had when implementing these teaching approaches. Field notes were also essential in this process since they provided a full and comprehensive record of everything viewed, heard, and experienced on-site. These notes featured clear, descriptive, and reflective material that the researcher had taken personally during the observation. According to Hamied (2017), the direct observation method in this case study allowed the researchers to analyze the phenomenon from numerous angles, assess the relationships between different components, and grasp the process within its original context.

Following four rounds of observations, the researchers conducted interviews with the eight students in the class. The interviews focused on aspects related to the implementation of digital storytelling and local folktales in the classroom. The researchers inquired about the advantages of both approaches as teaching methods, as well as the challenges faced by the students during these implementations.

The data obtained from these interviews were thoroughly analyzed and then presented in the form of categories and narratives, aligning with the research questions posed by the researchers. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the students' perspectives on the benefits and challenges associated with the use of digital storytelling and local folktales in their learning environment.

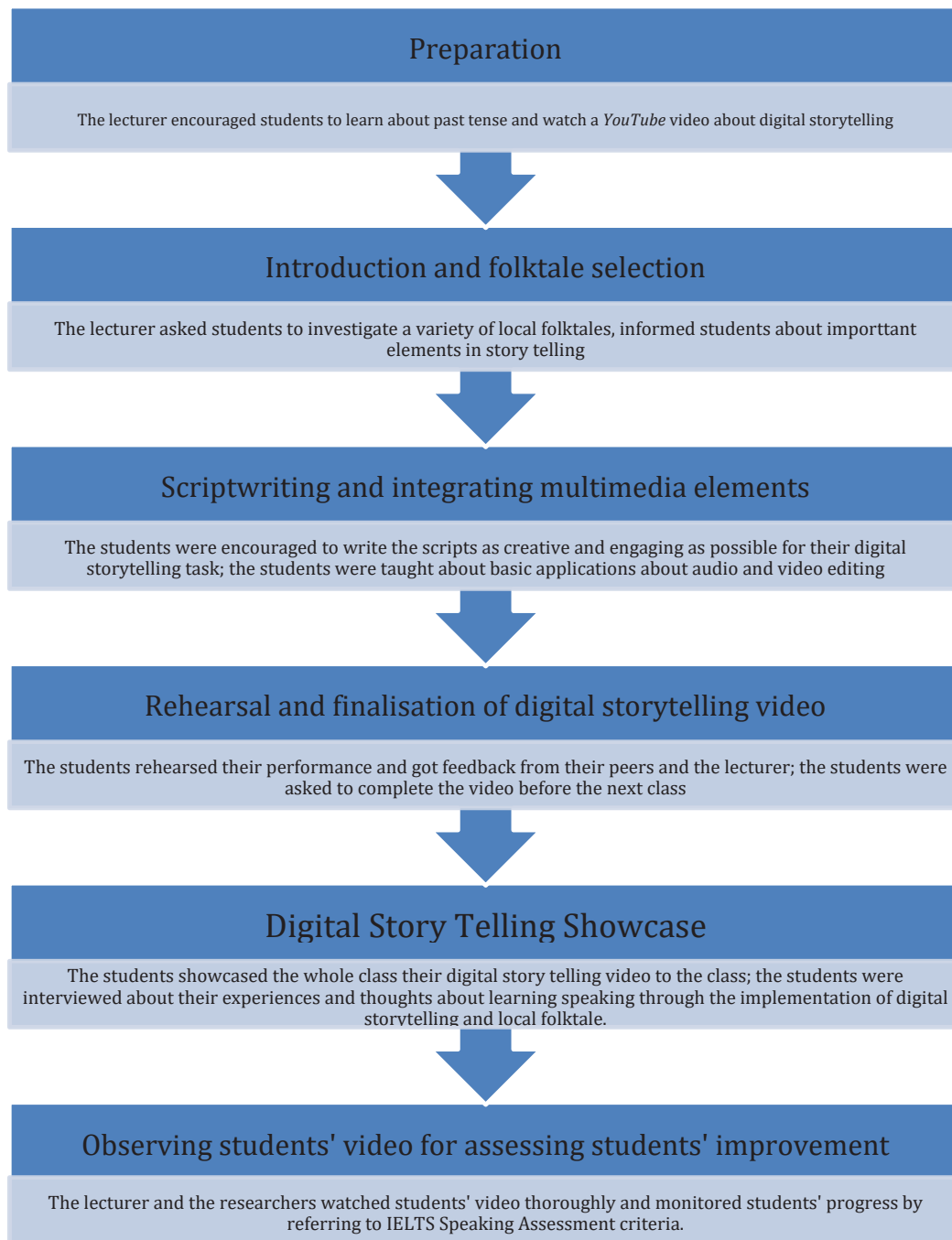
## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study's findings were separated into three categories: 1) The implementation of digital storytelling and local folktale in teaching speaking, 2) The benefits of digital storytelling and local folktale implementation as English-speaking teaching approaches, and 3) Students' obstacles during the implementation of both approaches.

### **The implementation of digital storytelling and local folktales in teaching speaking**

Implementing digital storytelling and local folktales in teaching requires extensive planning. This preparation entails designing learning activities and instructions as well as examining stories that adhere to both digital storytelling and local folktales. According to Arroba and Acosta (2021), digital storytelling is a sort of spoken production that uses text-based tools. Unlike traditional storytelling, it integrates digital media components such as photographs, videos, audio, and interactive features, making it more engaging and immersive. Digital storytelling may be generated utilizing a variety of tools and internet platforms, allowing students to integrate various multimedia elements to create a captivating and multimedia-rich narrative.

The learning approach was carefully prepared, considering the student's level of English proficiency. The implementation of digital storytelling and local folktale in this study was completed in the following stages:



**Figure 1. The Steps of Digital Storytelling and Local Folktale Implementation in Teaching Speaking Adapted from Wahyuni et al. (2018)**

Based on the interview results, students mentioned that before the lesson began, they were encouraged to learn about simple past tense and to watch a YouTube video about digital storytelling so that they would have a basic understanding of the subject. It was also part of their listening practice and time management so that they could focus on speaking practice when they arrived at class.

On the first day of observation, when the session began, the lecturer explained the fundamental characteristics of storytelling and reviewed and recognized elements of storytelling in the previous video that the students had watched. The lecturer then instructed each student to explore a variety of local folktales before selecting only one familiar local folktale. They analyzed the selected folktales as a class, looking at the people, issues, and major events. By guiding students through the process of adapting a folktale to a modern environment, the lecturer promoted students' creativity and imaginative thinking.

On the second day of observation, students were asked to write screenplays for their digital storytelling projects that included descriptive language, discussion, and intriguing narration. The lecturer provided tips on how to write engaging dialogue that portrays the characters' thoughts and intentions. Besides, they were taught how to include multimedia aspects into the narration by teaching them to record the narration clearly and emotionally, select or create relevant photographs and videos, and then edit these pieces together. They were also introduced to the basics of audio and video editing software.

On the third day of observation, the lecturer organized practice sessions for students to share their stories with their peers. Constructive feedback on pronunciation, tone, pace, and expression was delivered during the session. Furthermore, the lecturer also held short practice sessions for students to demonstrate their digital storytelling abilities, provided individual coaching and support, and focused on specific areas for the growth of each student. After that, the lecturer provided enough time for students to complete their digital storytelling projects at home to refine their scriptwriting, ensure a smooth flow of the plot, and incorporate multimedia elements effectively.

On the last day of observation, the students showcased their digital storytelling, emphasizing clear articulation and pronunciation, emotional connection, and intriguing storytelling. Following that, an interview session for students to share their perspectives and experiences was conducted. They were encouraged to talk about their struggles and lessons learned by discussing how digital storytelling has affected their speaking ability and confidence. Finally, the lecturer and the researchers monitored students' progress by watching the videos that they had completed referring to the IELTS speaking assessment criteria entailing four components: fluency, coherence and cohesion, grammar, and pronunciation.

### **The benefits of digital storytelling and local folktale implementation as English-speaking teaching approaches**

Digital storytelling and local folktale-based language learning had a positive influence on overall students' spoken English proficiency and participation. In today's digital age, technology has become a vital part of education, serving the needs of today's students. Digital storytelling is becoming an essential component of modern education, with considerable promise for long-term educational sustainability (Sabari & Hashim, 2023). As students can engage in relevant content and context when producing digital stories on a variety of topics, such an approach is significant for establishing effective speaking skills (Chambers & Yunus, 2017). Likewise, a study conducted by Sembiring and Simanjuntak (2023) revealed that using digital storytelling not only improves learners' speaking abilities but also has a significant impact on student's attitudes toward language learning in general and speaking skills in particular.

In this study, students identified considerable benefits from the introduction of digital storytelling. Based on the interview, the approach significantly improved their storytelling skills by allowing them to build storylines in a logical order. The lecturer's in-depth examination of important storytelling aspects including characters and plots was critical. This direction not only increased their comprehension of these concepts but also sharpened their scriptwriting skills. As a result, students were able to communicate their thoughts methodically and understandably, demonstrating a significant improvement in their storytelling ability. Therefore, the use of digital storytelling not only increased their creativity but also sharpened their speaking skill, promoting better coherence and cohesion aspects of narrative construction.

Besides, the lecturer's emphasis on employing the past tense was acknowledged by all interviewees as a crucial factor in the students' enhanced digital storytelling skills. This emphasis on past tense usage contributed greatly to the students' constant use of the past tense throughout their local folktales. Nuriyah's (2023) research backed up this discovery by demonstrating how digital storytelling improved her students' grammar precision while speaking. This finding indicated the students' clear comprehension of using the simple past tense when narrating previous occurrences. Consequently, the students not only improved their coherence and cohesion in narrative, but they also employed grammatical principles successfully when speaking, demonstrating a holistic increase in their language skills.

Pair feedback and practice sessions were able to improve students' fluency and pronunciation. They were able to detect and address pronunciation errors more effectively after practicing in pairs and obtaining prompt feedback, resulting in better clarity and fluency. Furthermore, the rehearsal allowed students to rehearse their folktales several times before filming the final video. This method fostered concentrated practice on difficult sounds, allowing them to improve their speech. The combination of peer feedback and rehearsal increased students' grasp of correct pronunciation and self-awareness of speech patterns. Therefore, students' fluency and articulation in their digital storytelling presentations improved. These findings are consistent with the findings of Wahyuni et al. (2018), who found that group discussions and class presentations improved pronunciation, fluency, and confidence.

Apart from enhancing spoken skills, during the interview, the students also acknowledged that their multimedia and technical abilities have improved significantly as a result of the integration of digital storytelling. These enhancements include video capturing, editing, and graphic design. In addition, according to Ahmad and Yamat's (2020) research, digital storytelling and multimedia proficiency not only improve technical abilities but also increase students' participation throughout the learning process. Students' increasing confidence and engagement allows them to successfully convey their thoughts and ideas. This also occurred with the students in this study, as they were actively involved in providing, negotiating, and discussing ideas when planning and carrying out the development of their storytelling throughout the observation.

In response to the study's first research question, it is obvious that introducing digital storytelling into speaking instruction enhances students' overall spoken English competence. Using structured storytelling tactics and collaborative activities, students improved in grammar (past tense), fluency, and pronunciation. The incorporation of multimedia and technical abilities increases confidence and active involvement. This comprehensive strategy not only enhances students' language skills but also stimulates creativity, resulting in a comprehensive and pleasant

language learning experience. Adopting this approach is crucial in today's shifting educational context for building confident and skilled communicators.

Incorporating local folktales into the teaching of speaking to university students in this study had significant effects on enhancing students' vocabularies. The folktales selected add a cultural context to the learning experience, making it more approachable and relevant. When students engaged with these narratives, they encountered specific terminology related to their culture, traditions, and history, which provided them with a deeper understanding of the language. Learning new vocabulary in the setting of a folktale enhances recall because students see how the words are used in various situations (Nuriyah, 2023). Emotional engagement in folktales improves vocabulary retention even more because students are more likely to remember words and expressions related to their emotional responses.

Besides, the implementation of local folktales into speaking instruction fosters students' capacity to examine other perspectives and convey opinions utilizing a diversified vocabulary. The research by Ayten and Polater (2021) emphasizes the importance of linking digital storytelling to real-life occurrences such as folktales. This method not only broadens students' vocabulary but also improves their understanding of the cultural values embedded in these narratives. Furthermore, collaborative investigation of folktales encourages teamwork by allowing students to analyze, evaluate, and repeat these stories jointly. Students improve their language abilities and vocabulary knowledge cooperatively through this shared learning experience.

As a result of the preceding explanation, the second research question has been answered. Incorporating local folktales into digital storytelling becomes an effective strategy for enhancing speaking, particularly in terms of vocabulary. It also promotes a comprehensive understanding of both language and culture by giving a culturally meaningful, emotionally engaging, and intellectually interesting learning experience. As a result of this approach, students gained insights into the values and traditions that impact their community, which encourages their cultural appreciation and improves their overall language learning journey.

### **Students' obstacles during the implementation of digital storytelling and local folktales**

Students face difficulties when engaging in digital storytelling through various media formats such as audio, video, and graphics, especially when they lack access to the necessary tools and resources. The digital divide created by limited access to high-quality gadgets and dependable internet connections is a major barrier noted by many students during the interview. Students struggle even if they have gadgets due to insufficient resources such as less supportive hand phones for editing applications, lack of technology knowledge, and lack of internet access. It is worth emphasizing that the majority of students come from low- to middle-income families and are unfamiliar with advanced technology. Furthermore, the lack of sophisticated instruments such as high-quality cameras, video editing software, and graphic design resources limits their creative potential and project complexity.

When learning new digital skills that require focused effort and constant practice, students frequently face a considerable barrier in the form of time limitations. Concurrently juggling many abilities, such as digital literacy, linguistic competency, time management, and communication ability, adds to the complexity. The desire for proficiency in these various areas throws a significant strain on students, limiting their capacity to devote sufficient time to each skill. Further-



more, a striking comment from students highlights the gap in competence and confidence levels due to the variety of digital tools available to them. This disparity is caused by inequalities in technological access, varying exposure to digital tools, and socioeconomic considerations. Such a disparity is a problem for educators and educational institutions seeking to create an inclusive learning environment.

Furthermore, access to resources, ranging from local folktales to multimedia, needs creative solutions, such as collaboration with communities and digital platforms. Moreover, assessing speaking skills via folktales introduces subjectivity, which is addressed by explicit standards and peer evaluation. With careful consideration, educators can use folktales' cultural and linguistic richness to provide an inclusive and effective language learning experience.

To address these concerns, all students must have equal access to technology. This includes ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have access to suitable technology. In addition, detailed instructions on how to use digital tools should be supplied by either the lecturer or the university. Thus, when students run into problems with their digital storytelling development, technological support will be readily available. It is also critical to provide thorough instructions and training on the usage of digital tools. Leveraging internet platforms expands resource accessibility, offering a diverse array of multimedia materials. Tutorials should be provided by lecturers or university administrations to provide thorough assistance. This proactive approach provides students with the information and abilities they need to use the digital technologies integrated into their education effectively. Anticipating obstacles in the development of digital storytelling, institutions should construct strong technological support systems. This ensures that students who are having problems can easily get aid from help desks or dedicated professionals. Students can traverse digital storytelling projects with confidence and efficiency by addressing potential technological obstacles in real time.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study investigated the implementation of digital storytelling grounded in local folktales to enhance Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' speaking skills. Through careful observation and interviews, it was clear that combining both digital storytelling and local folktales significantly improved the learning experience. Students participated actively in the creation of digital storytelling videos, which included scriptwriting, audio recording, image/video editing, and presentations. This multi-modal approach improved not only their speaking skills, particularly in terms of fluency, pronunciation, coherence and cohesion, grammar, and vocabulary but also promoted participation, cultural awareness, teamwork, and computer literacy.

This study also uncovered numerous remarkable benefits. Digital storytelling enhanced students' speaking skills, particularly in terms of pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy, coherence, and cohesion. It also inspired students to actively participate in group discussions and negotiations, resulting in enhanced confidence in speaking English. Furthermore, the incorporation of local Aceh folktales provided a culturally rich context for the learning content, making it real and meaningful to the students' lives. Thus, both approaches not only enhanced linguistic competency but also fostered a sense of cultural appreciation. While the benefits were substantial, there were also challenges. Students encountered challenges at several stages of the digital storytelling process, including scriptwriting and technological literacy. These difficul-

ties, however, were indicative of areas that may be addressed further in instructional design to improve the learning experience.

This study has important implications for English language lecturers because it emphasizes the significance of incorporating technology and local cultural factors into language learning. The findings highlight digital storytelling's potential as a dynamic approach for enhancing speaking abilities and fostering cultural awareness among EFL learners. Similar approaches can be used by educators to build interesting and interactive learning environments.

Future research should take into account approaches to address the problems that students face, improve instructional methods, and examine the long-term impact of such interventions on students' language skills. Furthermore, studying the application of these approaches in different EFL contexts and with greater sample sizes could provide a more comprehensive picture of its efficacy.

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