

**“The Role of Digital Games in Developing Oral Skills in the English Language from the perspective of EFL Secondary School Teachers in Jeddah”**

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## Abstract:

This study aimed at identifying the role of digital games in developing Secondary school students' oral skills in the English language from the perspective of EFL secondary school teachers. Furthermore, in recognizing the challenges faced by EFL teachers in applying digital games in the English language classroom. The study involved (269) randomly chosen English as a foreign language (EFL) Saudi female teachers working at secondary schools in Jeddah, who participated voluntarily in this study. The descriptive approach was applied using a five-scale Likert questionnaire for data collection. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed the positive role of digital games in developing secondary school students' English language oral skills as perceived by secondary school EFL teachers. Ultimately, This study highlighted the importance of digital games in improving students' English language oral skills (speaking & listening). It also argued that a better understanding of the contexts in which digital games are to be used in the EFL classroom and the roles EFL teachers play during digital game-based learning scenarios; is a necessary foundation for improving the viability of digital games as educational tools. Involving EFL teachers in additional training to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills in integrating digital games as a rich English language learning opportunity in the EFL classrooms is recommended.

**Keyword:** Digital games, Oral skills, EFL teachers, Challenges, Secondary school.

## Introduction

The English language is considered a crucial element in any educational system, where its importance is recognized as the most dominant channel of communication. This viable attention to the English language resulted in the English language being a major subject taught in schools and universities worldwide as a foreign language (EFL).

As English language learners are required to learn the four basic skills and acquire a certain level of proficiency in oral communication, The English language classrooms became the natural home for building skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, where learners need to have opportunities to express themselves and develop the all language skills in and out of the classroom in "Virtual Teaching" (Alyaz & Sinem 2016).

Crystal (1987) stated that "one of the most interesting developments in the field of language teaching in recent years has been the concern to provide students with 'authentic' spoken materials with which to work", such an orientation drives students to improve their level of speaking competency, and it gives them the feeling that their learning is of immediate relevance (Crystal, 1987, p 75, as cited in Ali, 2016).

Teaching oral skills (listening and speaking) have an essential place in language programs worldwide. Language teaching focuses on enhancing oral skills that meet students' needs for efficient and effective communication in a foreign language (Almutairi & Shukri, 2016) and (Ali, 2016). The main target of teaching oral expression is for EFL teachers to improve the performance of their students. Teachers are required to modify their teaching techniques to suit naturally energetic students' needs (Almutairi & Shukri, 2016). For example, teaching English in and out of the classroom needs some fun strategies, activities, and tools to solve instructional problems and encourage students to learn (Whitton & Langanb, 2019).

Learning and playing are intrinsically one concept. Although many researchers show that children and adults learn better when humor and fun are included and actively participate in the learning activity; however, many teachers do not equate learning with play (Arnall, 2018). Fitzgerald (2015) stated that games can develop various skills and stimulate communicative skills which may help the teachers to create a context in which the language is useful and meaningful.

New York University in 2008 established The Games for Learning Institute (GFLI) to study the features that can make digital games useful for education. Most students today would rather not be lectured or get information from a single source. Rather, they prefer to acquire knowledge from the easily available resources (digital and/or human) around them. On the other hand, teachers' aspects are the least explored issue in studies about teaching through digital games. However, the widely held belief is that teachers do not always have positive attitudes and are not as enthusiastic as the students in using digital games in classrooms due to the generational divide. In cases where teachers were unsure in applying digital games, it was clear that they were actually interested in integrating these games but worried about the classroom implementation due to various technical and pedagogical constraints. Digital Games Based Language Learning DGBLL

has received increased attention, especially in recent decades since various studies have reported successful implementations. However, its implementation is far from expected and desired due to instructional, technical, financial, and sociological barriers (AlYaz & Sinem, 2016).

### **Statement of the problem:**

Based on a changing ethos in school education, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, the move made towards active student learning approaches which facilitate knowledge construction in an active environment has contributed to a growing impetus on academics to consider pedagogies and practices that increase student enjoyment and satisfaction level (Whitton & Langanb, 2019).

The possible benefits of digital games in language learning and teaching have received increasing interest in recent years (Wattana & Reinders, 2015). Based on the study of Noraddin & Kian (2014), there is a scarcity of studies related to the use of digital games for learning in the Middle East Arab countries, and teachers' aspects are the least explored issues in studies about teaching through digital games (AlYaz & Sinem, 2016).

For that reason, this current study seeks to investigate the role of digital games in developing oral skills from EFL secondary school teachers' perspectives.

### **Study Questions:**

The present research intends to answer the following questions:

1. Do digital games have any role in developing students' oral skills in the English language from EFL secondary school teachers' perspectives in Jeddah?
2. What are the challenges in applying digital games in developing students' oral skills in the English language faced by EFL secondary school teachers in Jeddah?

### **Study Objectives:**

1. Identify the role of digital games in developing students' oral skills (Listening and Speaking) in the English language from EFL secondary school teachers' perspectives.
2. Recognize the challenges in applying digital games to develop students' oral skills faced by EFL secondary school teachers.
3. Design a questionnaire to aggregate information from respondents—EFL secondary school teachers' challenges and perspectives in using digital games.

### **Significance of the Study:**

#### **The findings of the study may benefit the following:**

1. This research will attract the educators' attention to concentrate on the use of digital games in teaching.
2. This research is expected to contribute to the way English oral skills are taught.
3. Suggested educational research knowledge of this study is valuable to researchers in the field.
4. The Suggestions of research areas are of importance to aspirant researchers in the field of EFL.
5. This research is expected to help take advantage of digital games and their designers by employing them in English language teaching & learning.

## Limitation of the Study:

The present study will be limited to the following scopes:

1. **Scope of Time:** The first semester of the academic year (2021-1442).
2. **Scope of Spatial:** The public secondary schools in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.
3. **Scope of Subject:** This study will limit digital games and oral skills to include listening and speaking skills.
4. **Human limitations:** The sample is limited to the female Saudi EFL teachers at public secondary schools in Jeddah.

## Definitions of Terms

### Role

According to Oxford Online Dictionary, the term "role" is defined as the function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation. Meanwhile, Cambridge Dictionary defines it as the position or purpose of someone or something in a situation, organization, society, or relationship (Wasito, n.d).

In the present research, the role is defined as how digital games are involved in teaching oral skills and how much influence they have on the learners.

### Digital Games

De Freitas (2006) stated that "digital game-based learning is the application using the features of video and computer games to build engaging and immersive learning experiences for achieving specified learning goals, experiences and outcomes" (as cited in Setiadi, 2018).

The definition of De Freitas (2006) will be adopted in this study.

### Oral Skills

Diaz and Mily (2017) defined oral skill as "the capacity of expressing oneself verbally for communicating, based on the linguistic rules of a language. It is divided into two complementary skills: listening (the receptive skill) and speaking (the productive skill); both of them are produced within a communication act, in which the speaker and listener communicate among themselves, not individually".

In the present research, oral skills (listening and speaking skills) are "Students' ability to listen and speak in English by way of communicating in and out the classroom through using digital games. "

## Literature Review:

### 1.1 Digital games

Nowadays, education is thriving through many touted new practices and theories capable of offering solutions to learning difficulties. Which are mostly based on the proliferation of digital and communication technologies; they emerged as a result of the digital revolution. Using digital games to achieve educational purposes directly or indirectly could become an increasing educational effort in the 21st century (Noraddin. & Kian. 2014).

Learning through digital games arose to use digital games' largely untapped potential to achieve effective game-based learning experiences for the digital generations (Schaaf and Engel, 2018). Many researches have shown that playing digital games have become an integral part of the contemporary youths' lives activities; digital games are common among children, adolescents, and even adults (Noraddin & Kian, 2014). Interest in learning by digital games has increased in recent years, many educational researchers, practitioners, and pundits have explained the use of digital games as potentially

powerful learning tools; to harness its pedagogical benefits in classroom contexts, and to enhance the language learning experience, both inside and outside the classroom (Sardone & Scherer, 2011) and (Schaaf & Engel, 2018).

Based on arguments and evidence of integrating digital games into instructions, several benefits can be gained using DGBL in English learning. First, digital games can enable students to engage in interaction in TL (target language). This is essential because the lack of TL usage may lead to inadequate language learning. (Ofsted, 2011). Another benefit is related to its ability to grow students' motivation, positively impacting students' learning outcomes in English learning. Also, using digital games can improve students' concentration and enhance their creativity because of the zeal of winning and competitions included in it. Besides, the benefit of using DGBL for English learning is related to its ability to improve students' vocabulary understanding; it can create an environment where learners are "forced" to use those words in the right circumstances (Setiadi, 2018). Digital games are also likely to influence learners' willingness to communicate. It affects learners' likelihood of improving their productive L2 skills, which means more frequent language use and eventually greater potential to increase language proficiency (Erkkila, 2017). The positive effect and instructional advantages of DGBLL materials have been reported about improvements in learners' writing, reading, and listening skills, grammatical accuracy, learners' general fluency, pronunciation in the target language. Regarding language skills, positive outcomes have also been reported in increasing learners' intercultural awareness and communicative competence because digital games provide learners with an invaluable opportunity to truly feel the target culture (ALyaz & Sinem, 2016). Also, learners' negative attitudes toward difficult subjects or boring subjects can be changed by using digital games by introducing them to easy and fun learning experiences (Noraddin & Kian, 2014).

According to Noraddin and Kian (2014), digital games can enhance other desired skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, imagination, and information-seeking skills. To sum up the discussion in this section, it can be argued that playing digital games in English benefits both in-school English studying and off-school English use in several ways (Erkkila, 2017).

## 1.2 Oral Skills

Teaching oral skills (listening and speaking) holds an essential place in language programs across the world. The focus of language teaching has been on enhancing oral skills to meet students' needs for efficient and effective communication in a foreign language (Almutairi & Shukri, 2016) and (Ali, 2016).

To develop the communication skills of students, teaching oral skills should be prioritized. Thus, focusing on listening and speaking first in language teaching programs is logical because it follows the natural flow of acquiring the first language (Almutairi & Shukri, 2016). "Developing proficiency in listening comprehension is the key to achieving proficiency in speaking." Based on the previous thought, it is important to say that listening can reinforce students' oral production and fluency; also, their pronunciation can develop and become more accurate to the English native speakers. The main target of teaching oral expressions is to improve the performance of students in oral skills (Ali, 2016).

Inside the classroom, listening and speaking are the most often used skills. They are known as crucial for functioning in the English language framework by both teachers and students. These skills also support instructional starting points when students have low literacy levels (Al-Omri & Ahmed, 2019). Teachers must modify their teaching techniques to suit the needs of naturally energetic students (Almutairi & Shukri, 2016). Oral skills can be improved in class through group work, pair work, role-play, debate, and language games requiring information exchange, choice and feedback, and problem-solving tasks (Al Masadeh, 2014).

## Previous Studies

### Wang Z, Han F (2021)

This study examined the effect of using a digital game-based language learning mobile application "Liulishuo" (speaking English fluently) to develop complexity, accuracy, and fluency of English monologic oral production among 30 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in English Education at a national university in China. The study used a quasi-experimental design, Monologic oral production was measured using the same narrative picture description task in pre- and post-tests. Our study showed positive effects of using a digital game-based language learning mobile application on the improvement of complexity, accuracy, and fluency of English language learners in China' monologic oral production with varying effects.

**Sinem, Z & Alyaz, Y (2016)**

This study was conducted to investigate educational digital games in foreign language teaching to explore the contribution of a digital game to the development of pre-service teachers' professional language skills in Turkey. The sample group for the study consisted of 60 second-year pre-service teachers (53 females and 7 males). The study used mixed methods design, the major database for the study were the quantitative data obtained through vocabulary knowledge test and the responses regarding the contribution of digital games to the professional development of pre-service teachers. Qualitative data were collected to support the quantitative data mentioned above. Pre- and post-tests were applied to measure the contribution of the digital game to the development of their language skills. In addition, a game diary and semi-structured interviews were used to elicit information about the problems pre-service teachers had and their perceptions on the whole process. The analysis of the data illustrated that there was great improvement in pre-service teachers' professional language skills and attitudes towards using these games while teaching in the future. This is important in foreign language teacher education to enhance digital game-based language learning pedagogy for teachers.

**Reinder, H & Wattana, S (2015)**

The study investigated the experiences of five students who had participated in a fifteen-week digital game-based learning program at a university in Thailand. To identify what impact digital games had in particular on their willingness to communicate in English. The tools conducted six interviews over fifteen-week for each one of them (for a total of 30 interviews). The results showed that digital game-based learning had several benefits for the participants in this study, particularly in lowering their affective barriers to learning and increasing their willingness to communicate. Furthermore, the participants felt the environment encouraged supportive interaction, and the absence of an open, public sphere provided a degree of anonymity. The study recommended for future research further investigate the affective element of (DGBLL) Digital Games-Based Learning Language on learning beyond the classroom. Much remains to be discovered about the potential for DGBLL for learning and teaching.

**Noraddin, E and Kian, N (2014)**

This study investigated the university teachers' perception of utilizing digital games in the classroom in Malaysian universities and colleges. The sample of the study consisted of 273 teachers in 5 Malaysian universities surveyed an online questionnaire. The research design was a survey questionnaire method. The study results showed that most university teachers in Malaysia have a positive attitude toward the benefits and uses of digital games in classroom teaching. That positive attitude is not impacted by gender, age, discipline, or other factors except by one variable: previous experience with digital games.

**Research Methodology****Research method**

The present study adopts a descriptive study design, which comprises a quantitative survey conducted among Saudi EFL secondary stage teachers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

**Population**

The study population consists of all (826) Saudi EFL teachers who work at secondary schools in Jeddah.

**Sample**

The study sample includes 269 Saudi female EFL teachers who are working at secondary schools in the city of Jeddah. The sample has been chosen randomly, and they participated voluntarily in this study.

## Study Tools:

In executing this study, the researcher obtained data by using one tool, which is a questionnaire. The researcher designed the questionnaire survey to examine digital games' role in developing oral skills in the English language, and challenges faced, from the EFL secondary school teachers' perspective in Jeddah.

The questionnaire is composed of 20 items and was administrated over the internet. The first part of the questionnaire is for demographic information collection, including qualifications and teaching experience. The second part targets gathering data on EFL teachers' viewpoint of the role of digital games in developing students' oral skills in the English language. The third part aims at collecting data on EFL teachers' viewpoint of the challenges faced in applying digital games in developing students' oral skills in the English language. The participants were asked to respond to the items by indicating their agreement level using a five-point Likert scale. The five options are: agree, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and undecided.

## Validity of the Tool:

To assess questionnaire validity, the teachers' questionnaire was given to experts in the field and specialist reviewers in related fields to judge the questionnaire's validity. Their comments and suggestions were taken into consideration for the modification of the questionnaire.

## Study Procedures:

**To answer the research's questions, the researcher followed the following steps:**

1. Reviewed the related literature and previous research about the research's variables.
2. Wrote the literature review and previous studies of the research.
3. Obtained approval from the University's Graduate Studies Office for research implementation in Jeddah secondary schools.
4. Selected the study tool: a questionnaire to identify EFL secondary school teachers' perspectives and challenges.
5. Designed the tool of the study.
6. Implemented the questionnaire on the research sample.
7. Analyzed the data collected by means of the questionnaire statistically by using SPSS statistical analysis program. Applied proper statistical analysis to analyze data collected and studied the relations between variables.
8. Formulated recommendations and future suggestions in light of the research results.

## Summary of Finding:

### Results Related to the First Question:

Do digital games have any role in developing students' oral skills in the English language from teachers' perspectives?

Table (1) represents the results of Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) to answer the question. In addition, the criteria used to judge the results as in table (2).

Low	Medium	High
1.00 to 2.33	>2.33 to 3.66	>3.66 to 5.00

Table (2)

#	Item	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	Digital games help students improve their oral skills -speaking & listening- by accomplishing a game-based task.	4.25	0.76	1	High
2	As a teacher, I think digital games will be back an important teaching tool in years to come.	4.13	0.90	7	High
3	Digital games help to employ meaningful and useful language in a real context.	4.17	0.78	5	High
4	As a teacher, I support teaching English using digital games.	4.14	0.87	6	High
5	I use digital games that befit my students' levels, needs, and interests.	4.13	0.79	8	High
6	Digital games encourage students' willingness to communicate.	4.20	0.78	3	High
7	Digital games help students promote fluency.	4.04	0.93	10	High
8	Digital games make students use the language instead of learning it.	4.21	0.82	2	High
9	Digital games help students improve their speaking skills by being supportive of other game participants.	4.19	0.76	4	High
10	Digital games help students improve their listening skills by contact with other players.	4.12	0.83	9	High
Average Mean		4.158	0.82	High	

Table (1) Mean and SD for digital games from teachers' perspective.

**Table (2) Mean and SD were calculated, and the results were the following:**

The range for the Mean of digital games' role from teachers' perspective was between (4.04 to 4.25), and SD ranged between (0.76 to 0.90). The level of items was (High).

The high level resulted and ranked as (1), (8), (6), (9), (3), (4), (2), (5), (10), and (7). According to table (2), the highest Mean was for item (1), which states that **(Digital games help students to improve their oral skills -speaking & listening- through accomplishing a game task)**, and the lowest Mean was for item (7) which states that **(Digital games help students to promote fluency)**. Moreover, the average for total was (4.158), SD was (0.82) and general level was (High).

This means that digital games have a high role in developing oral skills in the English language from teachers' perspectives.

The results reflect that digital games have become an integral part of contemporary youths' life activities. Also, it has several benefits in terms of increasing their willingness to communicate. These findings are partially in line with the results of Reinder, H & Wattana, S (2015), Sinem, Z & Alyaz, Y (2016), and Noraddin, E and Kian, N (2014).

### Results Related to the Second Question:

What are the challenges in applying digital games in developing students' oral skills in English language faced by EFL secondary school teachers?

Table (3) represents the results of Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) to answer the question.

#	Item	Mean	SD	Rank	Level
1	The Lack of appropriate training by teachers.	4.19	0.76	2	High
2	<b>The difficulty of applying digital games in a classroom.</b>	4.23	0.80	1	High
3	The lack of availability and accessibility for appropriate games.	3.81	0.99	3	High
4	The doubt about the benefits of applying digital games in a classroom.	3.76	0.92	5	High
5	The financial cost for applying digital games	3.65	1.04	6	Medium
6	Hard to find games that fit the curriculum.	3.51	1.02	9	Medium
7	The shortage of teacher training courses, which deal with digital games.	3.61	1.10	7	Medium
8	Using digital games is a waste of time.	3.57	1.11	8	Medium
9	Teachers do not prefer to apply digital games in a classroom because it requires preparation.	3.78	0.94	4	High
10	<b>The lack of teachers' motivation to use digital games.</b>	2.75	1.32	10	Medium
Average		<b>3.69</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>High</b>	

Table (3) Means and SD for challenges in applying digital games.

### Table (3) Mean and SD were calculated, and the results were the following:

The range for Mean of the challenges in applying digital games was between (2.75 to 4.23), and SD ranged between (0.76 to 1.32). The level of items was between (Medium and High).

The high level resulted and ranked as (2), (1), (3), and (4). According to the table (4.1) the highest Mean was for item (2).

The medium level resulted and ranked as (9), (5), (7), (8), (6), and (10). And the lowest Mean was for item (10).

The average for total was (3.69) with SD (1.00) and the general level was (High).

As can be seen from table (3), most of the participants agreed on the item that states the difficulty of applying digital games in a classroom.

### Recommendations:

**Based on the findings of this research, the researcher determined several recommendations as follow:**

- 1- A better understanding of the contexts in which digital games are to be used in the EFL classroom and the roles EFL teachers play during digital game-based learning scenarios must be founded to improve digital games use as educational tools.
- 2- Holding training courses in applying digital games for teaching English to increase teachers' awareness.
- 3- Involving EFL teachers in additional training to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills in integrating digital games as a rich English language learning opportunity in the EFL classrooms.
- 4- Encouraging digital games designers to develop digital games that suit learning.
- 5- Equipping the classroom with instructional materials to support digital game learning.

### Suggestions:

**Further studies should be conducted to:**

- 1- Investigate the effectiveness of digital games in developing English skills.
- 2- Examine the role of digital games in developing reading and writing skills for primary or intermediate stage.
- 3- Content analysis of the textbook to reveal the extent of containing digital games learning.

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## المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على دور الألعاب الرقمية في تنمية المهارات الشفوية لطلاب المدارس الثانوية في اللغة الإنجليزية من وجهة نظر معلمات المدارس الثانوية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. إضافة إلى التعرف على التحديات التي تواجهها المعلمات في تطبيق الألعاب الرقمية في فصل اللغة الإنجليزية. وشارك فيها 263 معلمة لغة إنجليزية سعودية ممن يعملن في المدارس الثانوية في مدينة جدة تم اختيارهن عشوائياً، وقد شاركن في هذه الدراسة طوعية. تم تطبيق المنهج الوصفي وجمعت البيانات باستخدام استبيان ليكرت الخماسي، وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS) حيث كشفت النتائج عن الدور الإيجابي لاستخدام الألعاب الرقمية في تنمية مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية الشفوية من منظور المعلمات. وسلطت هذه الدراسة الضوء على أهمية الألعاب الرقمية في تحسين مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية اللغوية لدى الطلاب (التحدث والاستماع)، وأوضحت أن فهمًا أفضل للسياقات التي يتم فيها استخدام الألعاب الرقمية في الفصل الدراسي والأدوار التي يلعبها معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية أثناء سيناريوهات التعلم القائمة على الألعاب الرقمية؛ هي أساس ضروري لتحسين جدوى الألعاب الرقمية كأدوات تعليمية. وأوصت الدراسة بإشراك معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في تدريب إضافي لزيادة الوعي والمعرفة والمهارات في دمج الألعاب الرقمية كفرصة غنية لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في الفصول الدراسية للغة الإنجليزية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الألعاب الرقمية، المهارات الشفهية، معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية، الصعوبات، المرحلة الثانوية.