



**The Development of the 1st year EFL Students' Speaking Skills through the NEARPOD
Platform**

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The development of the 1st year EFL students' speaking skills through the NEARPOD platform

Abstract

This study investigated how the NEARPOD platform improved the speaking abilities of roughly thirty first-year EFL students at a university. Limited practice opportunities, an important fear of errors, coupled with a large lack of confidence, often obstruct many learners' speaking skills. NEARPOD's truly interactive tools make it a really great digital educational platform. These tools importantly increase students' active participation and speaking performance. The study used classroom observation and semi-structured interviews plus thematic analysis to assess NEARPOD's effect on speaking fluency vocabulary use in addition to confidence. The findings show that NEARPOD promotes interactive learning through many real-time feedback mechanisms, collaborative tasks, as well as several structured speaking activities. Many students reported importantly increased motivation, substantially reduced anxiety, along with greatly improved confidence while speaking. The platform's multimedia features, coupled with indispensable teacher guidance, importantly improved the communicative competence of many students. This study reveals important understandings into technology's effect on language learning. NEARPOD importantly improves the speaking skills of many EFL students.

Key words: EFL, speaking skills, NEARPOD, technology-enhanced language learning, fluency, interactive learning, digital tools, pedagogy.

NEARPOD платформасы арқылы EFL 1 курс студенттерінің сөйлеу дағдыларын
дамыту
Аңдатпа

Бұл зерттеу NEARPOD платформасы университеттегі шамамен отызға жуық бірінші курс EFL студенттерінің сөйлеу қабілеттерін қалай жақсартқанын зерттеді. Шектеулі тәжірибе мүмкіндіктері, қателіктерден қорқу және үлкен сенімсіздікпен бірге көптеген оқушылардың сөйлеу дағдыларына кедергі жасайды. NEARPOD нағыз интерактивті құралдары оны шынымен керемет цифрлық білім беру платформасына айналдырады. Бұл құралдар студенттердің белсенді қатысуы мен сөйлеу қабілетін арттырады. Зерттеуде сенімділіктен басқа, сөйлеуді еркін меңгерудегі сөздік қорды пайдалануға NEARPOD әсерін бағалау үшін сыныптағы бақылау және жартылай құрылымдық сұхбат, сонымен қатар тақырыптық талдау қолданылды. Нәтижелер NEARPOD көптеген нақты уақыттағы кері байланыс механизмдері, бірлескен тапсырмалар, сондай-ақ бірнеше құрылымдық сөйлеу әрекеттері арқылы интерактивті оқытуға ықпал ететінін көрсетеді. Көптеген студенттер мотивацияның айтарлықтай жоғарылағанын, алаңдаушылықтың айтарлықтай төмендегенін және сөйлеу кезінде сенімділіктің айтарлықтай жақсарғанын хабарлады. Платформаның мультимедиялық мүмкіндіктері мұғалімнің таптырмас нұсқауымен бірге көптеген студенттердің коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін айтарлықтай жақсартты. Бұл зерттеу технологияның тіл үйренуге әсері туралы маңызды түсініктерді ашады. NEARPOD көптеген EFL студенттерінің сөйлеу дағдыларын жақсартады.

Кілт сөздер: EFL, сөйлеу дағдылары, NEARPOD, технология арқылы жақсартылған тілді оқыту, еркін сөйлеу, интерактивті оқыту, цифрлық құралдар, педагогика.

Развитие разговорных навыков студентов 1 курса EFL через платформу NEARPOD

Аннотация

В этом исследовании изучалось, как платформа NEARPOD улучшила разговорные способности примерно тридцати студентов первого курса EFL в университете. Ограниченные возможности практики, сильный страх перед ошибками в сочетании с большой неуверенностью в себе часто мешают многим учащимся развивать разговорные навыки. По-настоящему интерактивные инструменты NEARPOD делают его действительно великолепной цифровой образовательной платформой. Эти инструменты значительно повышают активность учащихся и их устную речь. В исследовании использовались наблюдения в классе и полуструктурированные интервью, а также тематический анализ для оценки влияния NEARPOD на беглость разговорной речи, использование словарного запаса в дополнение к уверенности. Результаты показывают, что NEARPOD способствует интерактивному обучению посредством множества механизмов обратной связи в реальном времени, совместных задач, а также нескольких структурированных речевых действий. Многие студенты сообщили о значительном повышении мотивации, существенном снижении тревожности, а также о значительном повышении уверенности во время разговора. Мультимедийные функции платформы в сочетании с необходимым руководством преподавателя существенно улучшили коммуникативную компетентность многих учащихся. Это исследование раскрывает важное понимание влияния технологий на изучение языка. NEARPOD существенно улучшает разговорные навыки многих студентов EFL.

Ключевые слова: EFL, разговорные навыки, NEARPOD, изучение языка с помощью технологий, беглость речи, интерактивное обучение, цифровые инструменты, педагогика.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the academic field of teaching English to foreigners (EFL), it is a must that students enhance their speaking skills. In a world where communication is becoming more and more entwined, being proficient in the English language is essential for both professional and academic opportunities. However, traditional methods of teaching speaking might fall short in providing students with the exposure and practice necessary for mastery of speaking skill. Moreover, the introduction of technology in the classroom has created new opportunities for language acquisition. We believe that the Nearpod platform is unique among these tools because of its immersive and interactive capabilities, which give teachers creative approaches to help their pupils learn a language. It is pertinent and important to look into how well Nearpod works for EFL students' speaking skills development, given the increasing use of technology in the classroom and the necessity for efficient language teaching methods.

The literature reveals little about how Nearpod specifically affects first-year EFL students' speaking skill, in spite of its potential advantages. It is absolutely important for the successful integration of Nearpod into language training, specifically to importantly increase speaking skills, that teachers readily understand how to change their methods to meet the ever-changing needs of their students.

Lack of empirical investigation into Nearpod's effect on first-year EFL students' speaking skills has resulted from the growth of technology in language instruction. An important lack of information in this important area seriously obstructs teachers' ability to decide how best to integrate Nearpod into language instruction, thus possibly leading to them to miss important chances to importantly increase their students' language acquisition. Therefore, this research seeks to investigate the following research questions:

1. How does the integration of the NEARPOD platform impact the development of first-year EFL students' speaking skills?
2. What are the perceptions of first-year EFL students regarding the use of NEARPOD in improving their speaking proficiency?

This research clarifies NEARPOD's meaningful role as a highly effective instructional tool for developing many EFL students' speaking skills. The effectiveness of the platform in improving speaking expertise, its effect on learner engagement and confidence during NEARPOD-based activities, will be explored through classroom observations and student feedback. Educators receive practical strategies. These strategies help integrate technology into language teaching. The ability of many educators to effectively meet the needs of many EFL students, along with the promotion of importantly effective speaking skill development, is importantly improved by these.

1.1 The Subject of the Research

This study centers on a specific topic and that topic is "The Development of 1st Year EFL Students' Speaking Skills through the NEARPOD Platform". This study will thoroughly investigate how effectively NEARPOD, a truly interactive as well as technologically advanced learning platform, improves the speaking skills of first-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Meaningful opportunities for students to practice and develop their speaking skills in an engaging learning environment are created by the study's utilization of Nearpod's engaging features—such as interactive exercises, multimedia content, along with real-time feedback.

This research explores how NEARPOD-based activities affect students' speaking development, along with their engagement, in addition to their confidence during classroom sessions. Qualitative understandings into student experiences and progress will be gleaned from approximately fifteen semi-structured interviews, along with observations of roughly

ten classrooms. Effective pedagogical strategies are identified by this study. The study also draws attention to the major role of technology in encouraging speaking skill acquisition. This research will improve language instruction for first-year EFL students and offer practical recommendations for using revolutionary tools like NEARPOD in EFL education.

1.2 The Objectives of the Research

The effectiveness of integrating the NEARPOD platform into language instruction for first-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, with a particular focus on developing their speaking skills, was comprehensively analyzed by this research.

1. To explore the impact of NEARPOD-based speaking activities on the development of first-year EFL students' speaking proficiency by observing their progress in fluency, accuracy, and confidence during classroom interactions and analyzing recorded observations in detail.
2. To assess student engagement and participation levels in NEARPOD-enhanced speaking activities by comparing these interactive, technology-driven lessons with traditional teaching methods to determine how the platform fosters active and meaningful learning experiences.
3. To investigate students' perceptions of NEARPOD's overall effectiveness in improving their speaking skills by conducting semi-structured interviews to gather insights into the learners' views, experiences, perceived advantages, and the specific challenges they encountered while using the platform.

1.3 The Purpose of the Research

Classroom observations along with semi-structured interviews will help this study explore how first-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' speaking skills develop. Students' speaking skill engagement and challenges in developing oral communication skills are assessed. This assessment uses qualitative methods to provide

understanding. This study, by concentrating intensely on these key aspects, will pinpoint highly effective strategies, along with approaches, for importantly improving speaking skills in EFL classrooms, thus providing educators with truly important recommendations to greatly optimize language instruction and increase student progress.

1.4 Methodology

Researchers explored the development of speaking skill among first-year EFL students using the NEARPOD platform through a qualitative approach. Understandings into student engagement along with participation during NEARPOD sessions were gleaned from classroom observations. Researchers used semi-structured interviews to gather approximately 20 students' views of NEARPOD's effectiveness in improving their speaking skills, along with other data collection methods. Researchers analyzed observation data through thematic analysis to recognize trends in student behavior, while they also transcribed interview data to understand student experiences as well as attitudes. Researchers carefully followed moral guidelines. This included obtaining informed consent plus guaranteeing confidentiality to maintain research integrity.

1.5 Theoretical Value of the Research

This study's theoretical value stems from its contribution to understanding technology-improved language learning. This research importantly contributes to theoretical frameworks on language learning pedagogy, along with the integration of technology in education, by thoroughly examining how the NEARPOD platform effectively helps first-year EFL students substantially improve their speaking skills. This research reveals how technology importantly increases student engagement and participation in at least three speaking tasks, furthering theories on language acquisition along with the use of digital tools for improved language skill development.

1.6 Practical Value of the Research

This study offers really important understandings into effectively integrating the NEARPOD platform into language instruction, providing extremely practical implications for language education. These findings provide many educators as well as policymakers with several practical strategies to improve the spoken English expertise of an important number of first-year EFL students. This research reveals at least several effective strategies for technology integration in language education. Educators improve student engagement, participation and language learning with these practices.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Self-reporting bias affects the observational data and semi-structured interviews. This is a major study drawback. The specific setting and rather small sample of first-year EFL students importantly limits how broadly applicable the findings are. Outside factors, such as individual learning preferences or past language experience, may limit control over speaking expertise results. The study's sole focus on Nearpod limits its exploration of other digital tools or methods that might increase speaking skills.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Overview of EFL Speaking Development

EFL learners struggle to develop speaking skills, and they often lack vocabulary. Many students struggle to speak English fluently because they have too few vocabulary words. Many researchers, including Khan et al. (2018), show that a lot of vocabulary knowledge plays an important part in developing speaking skills for Saudi EFL learners. The authors pointed out that a limited vocabulary often harms many students' speaking skills, affecting their listening, conversations and expressions of ideas, and feelings. Many learners' speaking skills depend importantly on their vocabulary knowledge, as vocabulary plays an important role. Identifying multiple knowledge gaps in existing studies leads researchers to explore multiple future directions for investigation.

Researchers have created the influence of vocabulary on speaking development, however many important knowledge gaps still exist in current studies. To improve the speaking skills of EFL learners, we must actively explore and develop targeted strategies and interventions that effectively address their vocabulary limitations and help improve their overall communication abilities. To understand how vocabulary size, fluency and accuracy relate in EFL speaking, we need to do further research. Language educators and curriculum designers can gain many precious understandings by actively understanding how speaking expertise interacts with vocabulary acquisition.

2.2 Approaches to Teaching a Foreign Language to Develop Speaking Skills

To develop speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), teachers must use effective methods and they should address the linguistic, and psychological challenges. To create opportunities for meaningful communication, reduce anxiety and promote active participation, these methods should be implemented effectively. Communicative Language

Teaching (CLT), which is widely adopted, is concentrated on for language learning by many as authentic interaction forms its foundation. CLT promotes activities like role-plays, group discussions and real-life simulations and these help learners build fluency, accuracy and confidence. In 2006, Richards emphasized that by concentrating on meaning rather than form in Communicative Language Teaching, learners are able to engage in spontaneous communication, which is a necessary skill for achieving fluency. Many educators find Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to be a strong method, as it gives emphasis to multiple meaningful tasks that mimic real-world situations. Ellis (2003) explains that TBLT combines fluency and accuracy. It engages learners in problem-solving tasks. It involves collaborative projects and storytelling. Learners practice language skills in context. These activities improve their ability to communicate effectively. In recent years, educators have begun to transform speaking instruction through Technology-Improved Language Learning (TELL), which effectively integrates multimedia, and interactive tools, making the learning process more engaging and effective for students. Engaging, student-centered learning experiences improve speaking skills, and platforms like NEARPOD have proven effective in this area. Multimedia technologies like NEARPOD increase motivation, promote self-directed learning and increase active participation, as found by Dzasezheva et al. (2023). Real-time feedback and gamified activities are used to create many immersive environments for speaking practice. These environments effectively address several limitations found in customary methods of teaching. Speaking skills develop importantly because psychological, and ethnic factors influence language learning. Marchibayeva et al. (2015) concentrate on that by importantly reducing speaking anxiety and regularly incorporating multiple ethnic elements into lessons, teachers can greatly improve a large number of learners' abilities to communicate effectively. By engaging in ethnically relevant role-plays, and discussions, learners promote both confidence and competence, as these activities create an authentic

context where language can be used effectively. Combining CLT and TBLT with technology like NEARPOD meets learners' varied needs. It offers great advantages. Dynamic, and interactive learning environments are created by this integration. Many common barriers to speaking expertise are helped to be overcome by it. Some examples of these barriers include anxiety and limited practice opportunities. Revolutionary and flexible approaches are needed to develop speaking skills in foreign language instruction. These approaches improve learning outcomes. Interactive methodologies and technology are leveraged by educators to give learners the tools and confidence needed to achieve communicative competence in real-world contexts.

2.3 Technology Integration in Language Learning

In the past decade, a growing interest has developed. This interest concentrates on the integration of technology into language learning. This literature review combines recent research findings on how technology integration affects language learning skills and it specifically concentrates on improving English language learning. A literature review was conducted by Ahmadi (2018) and it found that using new technologies greatly improves language learning skills. The study by Flores (2015) is adjusted with this finding, as it was also found that the learning and teaching of English language skills are greatly improved by the integration of technology into classrooms. Technology importantly improves language learning outcomes, and these understandings strongly suggest that its role is important for success. Flores (2015) suggested that integrating technology-improved language learning (TELL) activities into the language learning curriculum is both feasible and desirable and many educators support this idea because they believe it will vastly improve student engagement and success. Many educators see great potential to use technology in principled ways to support language learning in multiple educational settings. Flores (2015) explored how gamification improves second language learning. Technology integration also positively

affects language learning. The study showed that using gamification engages many learners and it promotes language learning in an enjoyable and interactive way. The existing literature shows precious benefits of technology integration in language learning, but researchers still need to explore the knowledge gaps. Future research could explore which technologies and digital tools most improve multiple language skills. All in all, the literature reviewed shows that technology integration positively affects language learning, especially in English and we must examine the potential challenges, limitations and strategies to address them. Evidence exists that shows technology-improved language learning activities can be integrated into the curriculum. This integration is seen as both feasible and desirable. Much more research must explore multiple technologies and many potential challenges, and we should identify effective strategies for integrating technology in language learning.

The reviewed studies reveal costly understandings into how technology aids language learning and they set a strong foundation for future research.

2.3.1 Nearpod as a pedagogical tool. Many educators now actively integrate multiple forms of technology in classrooms, as they continually search for countless revolutionary methods to actively engage students, and importantly improve their learning experiences. Educators widely use Nearpod to create engaging and interactive multimedia presentations for their students. The use of Nearpod as a pedagogical tool, and its effects on student engagement and learning outcomes are targeted to be explored in this literature review. Davies, Dean and Ball (2013) conducted research to explore how teachers integrated instructional technology, like Nearpod, into a college-level spreadsheet course for information systems and they found that this approach improved student engagement. The classroom flipping technique and multiple types of instructional technology, including Nearpod, importantly increased many students' engagement and improved their overall learning outcomes, as shown by the study's findings. Active learning and student

participation in the classroom can be effectively promoted by the use of Nearpod, as suggested by the findings of Davies, Dean, and Ball in 2013. Hamilton, McKechnie, Edgerton and Wilson (2020) explored immersive virtual reality as a tool in education and they conducted a systematic literature review. This study concentrated on virtual reality. However many findings showed that interactive and immersive technologies like Nearpod engage students. These tools can greatly improve learning experiences. It is suggested that immersive learning environments that fascinate students' attention and promote active participation can be created by Nearpod with its interactive features (Hamilton et al., 2020). Engagement by students and learning through technology are often improved by multiple methods. A review of literature drawing attention to the measurement of student engagement in technology-mediated learning was carried out by Henrie Halverson and Graham in 2015. They looked at multiple studies and analyzed many findings about how students interact with technology during their learning experiences. The review drew attention to several key reasons why student engagement is important for successful online and technology-improved learning environments, presenting that many active participants tend to grasp the material much better compared to those who are less involved. This review did not specifically address the use of Nearpod, but it concentrates on how important student engagement is in learning with technology and this adjusts well with Nearpod's ability to encourage active participation and interaction, as noted by Henrie, Halverson and Graham in 2015. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the self-determination theory (SDT) was applied by Chiu (2021) to explain how students engaged in online learning activities. The study showed that autonomy brings student engagement. Competence, and relatedness also help students stay engaged. Although this study did not explicitly mention Nearpod, understandings into the factors contributing to student engagement are provided by the theoretical framework of SDT, which can be relevant for the use of Nearpod as a tool to support many students'

psychological needs and motivations (Chiu, 2021). Teachers, and researchers are actively working to predict how engaged students will be and what their learning outcomes will look like in order to improve educational strategies, and encourage a better classroom environment. Hussain, Zhu, Zhang, and Abidi (2018) conducted a study to explore how predicting student engagement in an e-learning system can directly influence the assessment scores students receive in their courses. The study used predictive modeling and it predicted how student engagement affects learning outcomes. Student engagement predicts academic achievement and this study reveals its importance even though it did not focus on Nearpod. Many find that using Nearpod increases student engagement and positively affects their learning outcomes.

Technology integration is viewed by many teachers. Several researchers, including Vongkulluksn, Xie, and Bowman (2018), studied how value affects teachers' views on technology and their grasp of external challenges. Teachers' beliefs, and attitudes play an important role and many studies zero in on how they affect technology use in classrooms. While teachers' views, and values importantly influence how technology is integrated, the study concentrates less on Nearpod itself. Many educators see Nearpod as a useful teaching tool and this may greatly affect how well they implement it in their classrooms. The reviewed literature offers many costly understandings into how teachers can effectively use Nearpod as a powerful pedagogical tool in their classrooms. The findings show that Nearpod can improve student engagement. It promotes active learning. It also positively affects learning outcomes. Further research is needed to explore how Nearpod specifically affects student engagement and academic achievement across varied educational settings. Future research could explore several studies on how to best use Nearpod to improve student learning. The literature reviewed clearly indicates that Nearpod can act as a costly pedagogical tool and it improves the creation of interactive and engaging learning experiences for students.

2.3.2 Previous studies on Nearpod in EFL education. An increasing interest has been shown in the integration of technology by many in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Many educators are noticing that Nearpod, with its many interactive features and engaging resources, has great potential to importantly improve EFL instruction. The previous research findings on the use of Nearpod in EFL education are targeted to be synthesized and analyzed in this literature review, while gaps in the literature are also to be identified and suggestions for future research directions are to be proposed.

2.3.2.1 Nearpod in EFL instruction. In the middle of many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) drew attention to how important it is for many educators to transition EFL classes online, knowing that this shift can greatly improve learning opportunities for countless students. The authors give emphasis to the fact that platforms like Nearpod can help make online EFL teaching engaging and interactive. Izacard et al. (2022) explored how retrieval-augmented language models can improve language learning and their findings may be important for improving the effectiveness of Nearpod in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The findings suggest that integrating advanced language models in educational platforms like Nearpod can support EFL learners in varied linguistic contexts, while researchers concentrated on few-shot learning to explore this potential.

2.3.2.2 Student engagement and language learning. In 2021, Hiver and colleagues undertook a systematic review to explore different research methods, and how engagement is defined in language learning, drawing attention to the varying approaches used in the field. This review explores multiple methods researchers use to define engagement and it analyzes how they measure it in language learning. This review draws attention to several ways Nearpod increases student engagement in EFL instruction and many teachers should pay attention. To explore how Nearpod affects student engagement, and language learning,

researchers must conduct many studies. Many aspects of L2 grit, which refers to students' strong passion and determination for learning a second language, were studied by Teimouri et al. (2020) and their research draws attention to the importance of perseverance in language learning. Many researchers can actively use this concept to examine how EFL learners stay motivated, and persistent while using Nearpod for language learning, which shows multiple psychological and emotional factors related to technology in EFL education. How Zoom helps ease synchronous online language learning was the focus of a study by Kohnke and Moorhouse (2020), and their research explored its effect on student engagement and interaction. They explained how digital platforms can help with EFL instruction and they shared their knowledge about their potential. The researchers concentrated on Zoom. They were targeted to understand its features. Many researchers have found results that apply to multiple online language learning platforms and these findings can help improve the learning experience. Included among the multiple educational tools, Nearpod and a few other platforms are, therefore, very useful resources that improve the learning experience for students. Many platforms importantly affect EFL education, and they improve learning opportunities. Many teachers want to use Nearpod in EFL education, yet important knowledge gaps remain. To understand how Nearpod influences student engagement and language learning outcomes, researchers need to conduct empirical studies and these assessments will also help determine its overall effectiveness in EFL contexts. How personalized learning algorithms and advanced language models in Nearpod can be used to support the different needs of EFL learners could be investigated in future research. To evaluate how Nearpod affects the language skills and motivation of EFL learners over time, researchers should conduct longitudinal studies that will provide precious understandings into these effects. More research is necessary to grasp how Nearpod improves EFL education and affects student engagement, language learning, and teaching effectiveness, as existing studies

show its potential. We will identify the knowledge gaps that exist in our understanding, and we will take steps to address them effectively. We will explore how multiple advanced language models and many personalized learning algorithms can be integrated to improve educational outcomes. Future research can improve our comprehension of how Nearpod improves EFL instruction and it will provide costly understandings into its effectiveness.

2.4 Technological Affordances for Speaking Skills Development

Studies, especially those concentrating on EFL contexts, have importantly increased in 2023, clearly showing an outstanding rise in research exploring NEARPOD's effect on contemporary teaching practices. Researchers explored the platform's capabilities for language learners using technology. Nguyen and Tran (2023) clearly showed how NEARPOD's really engaging features match the communicative language teaching approach. Live polls, along with video submissions, helped many students practice many real-time speaking tasks, thus enabling immediate feedback, as the study showed. Improved pronunciation accuracy along with spontaneous speech production resulted from these features for first-year university students.

The adaptability of NEARPOD in quite large classrooms, even those with importantly mixed skill levels, was explored extensively by Rahman et al. (2023). A 25% increase in active participation, compared to customary methods, was observed, as a result of the platform's customization options enabling instructors to change speaking activities to individual learner needs, as indicated by the findings. NEARPOD's personalized feedback effectively helped students address their specific speaking weaknesses and research continues to highlight its role in maintaining high levels of student engagement. Garcia and Chen (2023) comprehensively studied its effect on EFL learners in remote, and hybrid learning environments. Gamified NEARPOD elements increased learner motivation. NEARPOD's multimedia capabilities, including its ability to integrate videos, images, as well as text

smoothly, were the focus of another study by Oliveira et al. (2023). Students found lessons importantly more engaging and memorable, thus greatly improving vocabulary and expression retention for speaking tasks. Diverse learning preferences—auditory, visual and kinesthetic—are accommodated by the platform's design.

2.4.1 Addressing Psychological Barriers to Speaking. An important amount of language anxiety is recognized in many EFL classrooms, as an important challenge highlighted by prior research. The potential of NEARPOD to importantly alleviate this issue has been explored extensively in recent studies. Park and Lee (2023) did a longitudinal study of high school students. The study showed that consistently using NEARPOD in speaking activities importantly reduced their anxiety over time. The platform's incredibly useful anonymous response feature, quite simply, let students practice freely, without worrying about judgment.

Patel along with Singh (2023) examined the meaningful role of peer collaboration in many NEARPOD sessions. Activities encouraging large group interaction promoted a truly supportive learning environment, importantly reducing apprehension, as well as increasing students' confidence in oral communication, according to their research. NEARPOD's implementation has limitations, despite its advantages. Technical disruptions, such as connectivity issues or device incompatibility, sometimes slowed Ahmed as well as Ibrahim's (2023) lessons. The developers suggested at least two key improvements: adding offline capabilities, along with guaranteeing sufficient infrastructure support for resource-limited settings.

Jones et al. (2023) also pointed out a really important problem: teachers new to advanced technologies faced an extremely steep learning curve. Educators truly need really thorough training programs, so they can effectively maximize NEARPOD's potential; this is something that they strongly zeroed in on. Researchers have identified several promising

avenues for future investigation. Chang as well as Wu (2023) proposed, quite cleverly, integrating NEARPOD with really exciting emerging technologies like virtual reality to produce truly engaging language learning experiences. Researchers can broaden the scope and relevance of this application. Exploring many less commonly taught languages, and diverse ethnic settings will help.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The previous chapter reviewed literature on speaking skills in EFL contexts. It concentrated on the challenges learners face, and the benefits of using technology in language education. This chapter describes the methods we used to tackle the research questions and it explains how these methods guided the study. The NEARPOD platform increases many first-year EFL students' speaking skills, and it improves their engagement, and confidence. The qualitative research design adopted for the study, centered on semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, is described in this section. We chose the qualitative approach to gain a deep comprehension of how many students perceive and behave. This method offers a nuanced view that complements our exploration of speaking skill development.

The research design is introduced in the first part, showing its strong alignment with the study's multiple objectives. Detailed in the following sections is how participants are selected, methods of data collection used and the multiple processes that are involved in gathering the necessary information. The researcher is able to explore many nuances of multiple students' experiences with NEARPOD by concentrating heavily on qualitative data. By using thematic analysis to recognize trends and understandings from interviews and observations, the chapter actively outlines the approach taken for analyzing the qualitative data, and it helps readers understand how these methods contribute to the overall findings. The study includes important moral considerations that outline multiple measures taken to protect the rights, privacy and well-being of all participants involved, guaranteeing that multiple safeguards are in place for everyone's benefit. In this methodology chapter, a clear framework outlines how researchers conducted the work, and it also increases the credibility, and reliability of many findings discussed in later chapters.

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how the NEARPOD platform impacts the speaking skills of first-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The research targets to discover how students view the platform's effectiveness. It also explores changes in their engagement, and confidence during NEARPOD speaking activities. These goals fit a qualitative approach well and it works effectively. Students' experiences and behaviors are deeply understood through it and understandings are provided. This depth cannot be caught by quantitative methods, yet it remains elusive. The researcher is able to explore many nuances of multiple students' experiences with NEARPOD by concentrating heavily on qualitative data. Different perspectives and understandings are revealed through this exploration. Qualitative methods ideally explore complicated phenomena in natural settings. This makes it appropriate to understand how students interact with technology in language learning as noted by Creswell in 2009. By conducting many semi-structured interviews, and observing many classrooms, this study catches a variety of subjective perspectives and observable behaviors, which collectively lead to a deep comprehension of the important role NEARPOD plays in improving speaking skills.

The researchers collect many student views through interviews and this helps them understand their experiences and thoughts better. Participants can express thoughts in detail and this flexible format maintains alignment with the study's objectives. By designing interview questions specifically for this purpose, researchers explore how NEARPOD influences speaking confidence, engagement and perceived progress among students. Teachers ask students questions like, "What features of NEARPOD helped you feel more confident in speaking?" to encourage detailed responses from them, consequent in wealthy qualitative data. By conducting classroom observations and several interviews, researchers gather precious understandings, which importantly improve, and provide context to the findings. Real-time student behaviors during NEARPOD sessions are actively caught by

these observations, revealing their willingness to speak and level of participation while also showing non-verbal indicators of confidence like eye contact, and body language. Check off the observations, and use the checklist. Structure is provided for data collection. It is important for organization. Engagement and interaction grab attention. The researchers use a Sequential Exploratory Design. They often choose this method. It helps them gather costly data. Through two special stages, they collect qualitative data and they analyze it closely.

Gathering wealthy understandings in a structured way is what this approach effectively enables them to do as they focus intently on the early stages of their study. Classroom observations reveal many ways students interact with NEARPOD. All participants, aged 17 to 20, had prior experience using NEARPOD for speaking activities during coursework. These observations also uncover multiple students' behaviors. In-depth exploration of students' personal experiences is allowed by semi-structured interviews and an interpretation of observed behaviors is helped by this examination based on how their own experiences are perceived by many students. Researchers can fully address both observable dimensions, and relevant experiential aspects by employing this sequential approach, guaranteeing a thorough understanding. Understandings into how NEARPOD eases the development of speaking skills will be provided. Concentrating on how the platform is perceived in terms of its effectiveness, we will examine its effects on both user engagement and confidence. A wealth of student experiences catches deep complications and offers costly understandings for EFL educators regarding technology use in language teaching.

3.2 Data Sample

First-year university students in EFL courses that aim to improve their speaking skills are the focus of this study. Many students actively use the NEARPOD platform for learning and they make up the target population. The study selected these students because they focus on how effectively NEARPOD improves their speaking skills, and increases their

engagement and confidence. The researchers used purposive sampling. They selected participants who could provide costly understandings into the research questions. Purposive sampling is used to select people who meet certain criteria, like active participation in NEARPOD activities, and a willingness to be interviewed. The data collected is guaranteed to be directly relevant to the study's objectives and to catch the many different experiences of students with multiple levels of skill, and engagement. The research sample includes 10 to 12 students who participate in semi-structured interviews. It also includes a group of participants observed during NEARPOD-based speaking activities. A varied group of participants was chosen to represent different speaking skills, guaranteeing that multiple viewpoints on the platform's effectiveness were included. Multiple academic disciplines were represented by these students, who were enrolled in first-year EFL courses at the university, while NEARPOD's application in different contexts was better understood. All participants, aged 17 to 20, had prior experience using NEARPOD for speaking activities during coursework. The study targets many understandings by examining this sample, collecting individual views through interviews and noting behaviors in classroom activities. Wealthy, detailed understandings into NEARPOD's role in improving speaking skill are guaranteed by this sampling approach and the effect on student engagement, and confidence is also drawn attention to.

3.3 Research Site

The research was conducted at SDU University, which is located in Kaskelen and operates as an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) institution, providing education in English. First-year bachelor's degree students in different majors took English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses. The researchers explored how the NEARPOD platform affects students' speaking expertise and confidence and they also looked at its effect on their engagement. Participants who met the study's criteria were selected and a purposive sampling method was

used. Students with NEARPOD experience participated in speaking activities and some were available for interviews and classroom observations. Many precious understandings were provided by the participants who were carefully chosen for their suitability to answer the research questions and this approach played an important role in guaranteeing their effectiveness. They chose a varied sample of speakers, so many levels of speaking expertise are represented to guarantee comprehension of NEARPOD's effectiveness. For the semi-structured interviews, the research sample comprised about ten to twelve students and many of them were selected based on their varied backgrounds and experiences. The participants agreed on a schedule and the team conducted these interviews privately at SDU University. Through in-person interviews, a deeper exploration of NEARPOD's role in increasing students' confidence, understanding their views and examining their engagement during speaking activities was made possible. On campus, the researcher, who worked as an Assistant Instructor and knew the site well, actively conducted all qualitative data collection tasks while effectively recruiting and scheduling participants. During NEARPOD-based speaking activities we conducted classroom observations. This targeted to catch engagement in real time and also to understand behavior clearly. Additional context to the interviews was provided by the observations, which concentrated on non-verbal indicators of confidence, participation levels, and interactions that occurred during the speaking tasks.

SDU University provided easy access for researchers. It also related closely to the study's focus making it a suitable choice. By serving as an Assistant Instructor at the institution, the researcher created a convenient, and compassionate setting for conducting many interviews and multiple observations, which in turn enabled an easier and more efficient process for collecting data. This study aims to give understanding into NEARPOD's role in developing speaking skills and engaging learners in an EFL context by concentrating on this sample.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

In this study, researchers explored how the NEARPOD platform improves speaking abilities in many first-year EFL students, targeting to identify effective strategies for improvement using a qualitative approach. The researchers conducted many semi-structured interviews, which enabled them to gather an enormous amount of detailed data. The researchers conducted multiple classroom observations in order to gather precious understandings and improve their comprehension of teaching practices. These were used to address several research questions. Seeking to understand the varied experiences of students, these approaches also explore how deeply they engage with their learning.

Researchers frequently use flexible semi-structured interviews, which allow them to explore participants' ideas, and experiences in-depth; this method formed the qualitative part of the study. Many eligible first-year EFL students were fully engaged in their language classes, and this participation was seen by their teachers as a positive sign of their commitment to learning. As a practical tool, they used NEARPOD and found it effective. The researchers identified many patterns in student engagement, and participation.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection began after the approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee at SDU University to guarantee that moral standards were met. During a span of two months first-year EFL students were actively engaged by researchers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and classroom observations took place. Understanding that costly was gathered in this manner. Participation was open for the study. Voluntary participation was invited for many people. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. On campus, different groups of interviewers conducted in-person interviews with participants to gather important information, and understandings. At times convenient for students, they were held. Many students shared several experiences with NEARPOD. A checklist was used by observers during NEARPOD speaking activities to record engagement, participation and

non-verbal cues. Students understood their rights and realized they have the ability to withdraw at any time without facing any negative repercussions. In striving to cultivate a compassionate atmosphere for the study, the researcher guaranteed that participants' education would experience minimal disruption while also promising complete transparency about the process.

3.6 Data Analysis

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze multiple data. It collects data through several semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations to address how NEARPOD affects the speaking skills of many first-year EFL students.

Analyzing qualitative data is important and it provides precious understanding. The interview transcripts, and several observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcribers carefully worked on several interview recordings and they became familiar with the data. Initial codes were identified and organized into key features, then grouped into potential themes. They used the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) framework in many parts of the process, as explained by Braun and Clarke (2012). Researchers chose RTA for its great flexibility and high accessibility in interpreting qualitative data, which helps them identify, and analyze multiple patterns that connect directly to the research questions. To guarantee that a deeper comprehension of how speaking expertise, engagement and confidence are influenced by NEARPOD is achieved, the dataset was accurately represented by themes that were refined and reviewed. Several themes were connected to the research questions for better alignment with the study's goals. By reviewing the observation checklists, and notes, the researchers analyzed the classroom observations thoroughly and this careful examination helped to identify key strategies used by the teachers. The researchers identified many patterns in student engagement, and participation. They also noted non-verbal cues of confidence. They cross-referenced this information with interview data. This approach

offered a clear comprehension of how NEARPOD affects students. The study provided detailed understandings into students' experiences and it complemented the observations that drew attention to NEARPOD's role in developing speaking skills.

CHAPTER 4

Results

This qualitative study explores how the NEARPOD platform affects the speaking skills of first-year EFL students at SDU University. Special opportunities to engage learners in meaningful speaking activities arise from the platform, which has collaborative boards, real-time feedback and multimedia content and helps reduce language production anxiety. The research team conducts several semi-structured interviews. Researchers also observe classrooms. This helps them explore the platform's role in developing speaking skills. To understand how students perceive the effectiveness of NEARPOD, the research questions objective to identify multiple changes in both their engagement levels and their confidence during speaking activities. Integrating interactive technologies like NEARPOD into teaching practices can help EFL educators understand the benefits and challenges. The study reveals its importance through this potential. The findings add to literature on technology in language learning. They give clear recommendations for educators. They also point out areas needing future research.

4.1 Thematic Analysis Phases

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke in 2006, is a structured process that includes six special phases and each phase outlines particular steps that help researchers analyze qualitative data effectively. Familiarizing oneself with the data in the first phase involves thoroughly reviewing raw data, so one can understand it comprehensively and identify initial ideas. This study used Nvivo 14 software. The software helped analyze the qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews. Once all 12 interview transcripts were uploaded into the software, careful reading and re-reading were done to uncover understandings, and underlying concepts. To lay the groundwork for developing themes, researchers then created initial codes that served as the foundation.

In the second phase of the process, researchers actively identify interesting features in the data and systematically code these features in a clear and organized way. Organizing these features clearly and systematically is drawn attention to by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) as important. Byrne (2021) shows that researchers can highlight relevant text and they can also note codes in the margins. At this stage we coded all important elements. They addressed the research questions. We made sure to overlook no relevant data. Without grouping them, we recorded initial codes to keep clarity.

The focus shifts to organizing the initial codes into broader patterns as we search for themes in the third phase. It is noted by Byrne (2021) that moving from analyzing individual data points to interpreting aggregated meanings across the dataset is involved in this phase. Themes and sub-themes were drafted in this study and to guarantee clarity and alignment with the research objectives, redundant or irrelevant codes were removed.

In the fourth phase, people will actively engage in a careful process of reviewing and refining many themes to validate those that have been identified. To assess coherence, we evaluate many themes against several coded data extracts, and the overall dataset. Braun, and Clarke (2006 p.87) describe this step. They generate a thematic map. This map visually shows the analysis. The multiple themes were carefully reviewed by the researchers and were adjusted in multiple ways to guarantee that they accurately addressed all of the important research questions.

In the fifth phase we define and name themes. This phase needs a thorough exploration of many themes and sub-themes. We connect them back to the dataset and research questions. Byrne (2021) concentrates on the fact that researchers present a detailed interpretation of the themes in this phase and they support their analysis with relevant theoretical foundations to improve understanding. This study showed that students viewed

NEARPOD as effective for improving their speaking skills and improving their engagement, and confidence. Interpretive reports conveyed a detailed perception of the themes.

The report production is the sixth phase, and it involves contextualizing the themes and sub-themes, while often using clear, and relatable examples to depict them effectively. In this study many researchers used thematic analysis to explore how NEARPOD improves speaking expertise, importantly for a variety of learners targeting to improve their communication skills. Grouped into three main categories were the themes, which included challenges and areas for improvement, observed behavioral changes and views of NEARPOD's effectiveness. Figure 1 visually summarizes these categories, which we further break down into sub-topics and discuss in detail in the sections that follow.

4.1.1 Increased confidence. It was revealed by the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews that an important number of students experienced an important increase in their confidence while they were engaging in multiple NEARPOD-based speaking activities. Multiple responses revealed that first-year EFL students felt a greater sense of self-assurance because NEARPOD's interactive and supportive features emerged as an important factor that contributed to their learning experience. The interactive nature of NEARPOD enabled students to actively engage in gamified activities, collaborate on tasks and receive real-time feedback, which importantly increased their confidence in learning. In an environment with low pressure, students felt encouraged to speak freely, as these features encouraged a supportive atmosphere that removed the fear of immediate judgment. A participant shared, "I used to hesitate to speak in class, but the quizzes and polls made it fun and easier to join in." This reflects Dzasezheva et al. (2023), who found that interactive platforms lessen anxiety and increase participation in language learning. Many students found that NEARPOD's anonymous response options encouraged them to participate in class. They felt that using polls allowed them to overcome the fear of making mistakes. This made more

students feel confident when sharing their thoughts in front of others. Many students find that answering quietly increases their courage to speak more and Marchibayeva et al. (2015) show that less public exposure lowers anxiety and increases confidence. The NEARPOD activities have a structured and guided nature. This nature played an important role in building confidence. Many participants expressed appreciation for the step-by-step approach to tasks that enabled them to slowly, and steadily improve their speaking skills over time. Many students say, "NEARPOD helped us organize our thoughts before speaking, which made us feel much more prepared and confident," and this observation backs up Ellis's (2003) claims that multiple task-based learning environments importantly increase learners' confidence by supporting their language practice. By creating both a supportive learning atmosphere and engaging features, students were able to transition from being passive to actively participating in speaking activities. Many students showed a greater willingness to participate over time and observational data confirmed these findings by revealing fewer instances of hesitation or withdrawal during speaking tasks. Sustained eye contact and relaxed posture validate increased confidence and they serve as important non-verbal indicators. The NEARPOD platform plays an important role in increasing students' speaking confidence, as it provides a safe and engaging environment structured for effective language practice, helping them feel more at ease while they learn. Technology-improved learning tools can help overcome barriers in EFL speaking instruction and they can build confident, skilled language learners.

4.1.2 Improved engagement. Successful language learning relies on active student engagement. In this study, students clearly showed how the interactive features of NEARPOD greatly increased their participation during speaking activities. NEARPOD's use of collaborative boards, live quizzes, as well as real-time feedback strongly encouraged many students to actively contribute and engage with the content, unlike customary methods. This

section is devoted to discussing how student engagement was improved by specific features of NEARPOD, such as interactive tasks, anonymity options, as well as collaborative tools.

4.1.2.1 Collaborative boards: a space for collective participation. The Collaborative Board is considered to be one of NEARPOD's most commended features, providing students the wonderful opportunity to view as well as respond to their classmates' ideas. This interactive component allowed students to feel included in a shared learning process, which directly improved engagement. The best aspects of the collaborative boards were seen by me, as well as the ideas of other students, which helped in the learning of new vocabulary, as Student 6 shares: "The collaborative boards were the best because I could see other students' ideas, and it helped me learn new vocabulary". Moreover, Student 5 express opinion: "I think the collaborative boards were the most useful. I learned how to structure my ideas better after seeing how my classmates answered". This feature allowed students to view peer responses in real time, as well as offer inspiration for their own responses. Such visibility eases students' fear of judgment because they see their peers also navigating the language-learning process. Multiple responses revealed that first-year EFL students felt a greater sense of self-assurance because NEARPOD's interactive and supportive features emerged as an important factor. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory draws attention to the importance of social learning and scaffolding in language development (Vygotsky, 1978).

4.1.2.2 Live quizzes: gamification for engagement. Another essential feature is the use of live quizzes. These quizzes bring a sense of urgency and competitiveness, encouraging students to actively participate in the learning process. The time-bound nature of the quizzes promotes quick thinking, which is crucial for developing fluency:

"I liked the live quizzes because they felt like a challenge, and I wanted to do better than my classmates" (Student 9), "The live quizzes were especially fun because I wanted to score higher than my classmates" (Student 11). Live quizzes transform learning into a gamified

experience, promoting motivation and increasing the students' drive to actively engage. This is consistent with Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, which argues that intrinsic motivation is enhanced through a sense of competition, autonomy, and accomplishment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). By fostering a playful competitive atmosphere, NEARPOD encourages students to remain actively involved.

4.1.2.3 Anonymity in participation: reducing fear of mistakes. One of the most transformative aspects of NEARPOD is its option for anonymous participation, which significantly reduces students' anxiety about making mistakes. When students can contribute without being identified, they feel safer taking risks, which leads to greater participation. As Student 5 shares ideas: "Since I can answer anonymously in some tasks, I don't feel as embarrassed if I'm wrong". Moreover Student 12 answered : "Since we were all working at the same time, I didn't feel like the teacher was only looking at me".

Anonymity creates a psychologically safe learning environment. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, when students feel anxious, their affective filter "blocks" language input. By creating an environment where students can contribute anonymously, NEARPOD reduces anxiety and increases engagement (Krashen, 1982). Students feel encouraged to participate actively, knowing that mistakes won't draw attention or criticism.

4.1.2.4 Multimedia and visual elements: sustained attention. NEARPOD's multimedia features, such as embedded videos, images, and interactive slides, sustain student attention and reduce cognitive overload. By providing content in multiple formats (text, images, and videos), students remain engaged with the material. The variety prevents monotony, which is often a challenge in traditional, lecture-based learning: "NEARPOD felt more like a game than a lesson, and I stayed focused because I didn't want to miss anything"(Student 8),"It was fun and felt more like a game than a serious activity" (Student 6).

Multimedia appeals to the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles of students, keeping them engaged throughout the learning process. This is supported by Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which asserts that presenting information through multiple sensory channels leads to higher levels of engagement and comprehension (Mayer, 2001)

4.1.2.5 Real-time feedback: instant recognition of success and errors. Real-time feedback on student responses allows for immediate correction, which keeps students engaged. Unlike traditional classroom feedback, where feedback may be delayed until after the lesson, NEARPOD provides it instantly. This encourages students to reflect and modify their responses right away. Student 7 answered: "I liked how the teacher could send us feedback in real-time, and I could correct my mistakes before moving on", Students 9 highlighted: "The immediate feedback was helpful because I knew if I got something right or wrong right away".

Real-time feedback helps reinforce learning by offering immediate corrections, consistent with Hattie and Timperley's Feedback Model, which states that effective feedback needs to be timely, specific, and actionable (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). NEARPOD's feedback system achieves all three goals, making it an essential feature for improving student engagement.

4.1.2.6 Active collaboration and peer learning. In addition to collaborative boards, the ability for students to work together on assignments within NEARPOD creates an environment of collaborative learning. Students share responses, compare ideas, and work as a team to solve problems: "I liked that we could see each other's responses on the collaborative board, and it gave me new ideas for how to answer " (Participant 9), "It felt like everyone was working together. We weren't just sitting and listening to the teacher " (Participant 7). This collaborative approach is linked to Johnson and Johnson's Cooperative

Learning Theory, which suggests that students achieve higher engagement and academic success when working in groups (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Peer learning encourages students to become more active participants in the learning process. Moreover, active collaboration helps students share their opinion freely because of comfortable learning environment zone with peers.

The features of NEARPOD, such as collaborative boards, live quizzes, anonymity, multimedia, and real-time feedback, played a critical role in increasing student engagement during speaking activities. These tools encourage students to take a more active role in their learning process. Collaborative boards and peer feedback create a social learning experience, while live quizzes and multimedia tools make lessons more interactive. Real-time feedback ensures that students receive immediate support, helping them adjust their responses on the spot.

This combination of interactive features supports key engagement theories, such as Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978), Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), and Hattie and Timperley's Feedback Model (2007). NEARPOD's design aligns with these theoretical principles, creating an engaging, interactive learning environment that improves students' motivation, participation, and speaking confidence.

4.2 Challenges and Limitations

While NEARPOD offers a range of interactive features to support speaking development, students faced several challenges that impacted their learning experience. The main challenges identified by students included technical issues, limited time to complete tasks, complex instructions, and anxiety related to unfamiliar activities. These barriers affected student engagement, participation, and, in some cases, their willingness to continue speaking activities. This section discusses each of these challenges in detail, supported by student quotations and theoretical perspectives.

4.2.1 Technical issues: internet connectivity and system freezes. One of the most frequently cited challenges was technical issues such as slow internet connections, device freezes, and problems accessing certain features. Given that NEARPOD relies on an internet connection to facilitate live interaction, poor connectivity hindered students' ability to participate actively. Student 7 noted: "The only problem was when the internet was slow, and I missed some of the questions". Also Student 12 stated: "The internet lagged, and I missed a few questions, which made me feel left behind ". These technical issues affected the continuity of participation in quizzes and collaborative boards. Students reported that if the system froze or if the internet lagged, they could not submit their responses on time. This caused feelings of frustration and disconnection from the learning process. According to Muilenburg and Berge (2005), technical issues are one of the most significant barriers to e-learning environments, as they interrupt student engagement and reduce satisfaction. Future implementations could address this by offering an "offline mode" or enabling activities to be saved automatically during internet disruptions. Teachers could also provide more time for students to complete their responses, especially when technical issues occur.

4.2.2 Time constraints: pressure to respond quickly. Students also highlighted the challenge of limited time to complete activities. Quizzes and polls in NEARPOD are often time-limited, requiring students to answer questions within a set timeframe. This pressure to respond quickly was seen as both a motivator and a stress factor. For instance, Student 6 shared: "Sometimes the instructions were too fast, and I missed some of the questions", or Student 11 noted: "The time limits on quizzes made me anxious because I felt I had to think too quickly ".

The limited time impacted students' ability to formulate thoughtful responses. While fast-paced activities can encourage critical thinking and quick decision-making, they may also lead to cognitive overload for students with lower proficiency in English. This aligns with Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, which suggests that cognitive overload occurs when the working memory is overburdened with new information or tasks (Sweller, 1988). Teachers could offer the option to extend quiz times or provide "retry" opportunities for students who experience anxiety. Allowing students to see questions before the timer starts could also reduce stress and enhance participation.

4.2.3 Complex and unclear instructions. Another significant barrier for students was related to the complexity of instructions for NEARPOD tasks. Students noted that some activities, especially when new tools were introduced (like collaborative boards or video-based activities), were difficult to understand without additional teacher guidance: "Sometimes the instructions were not clear, and I had to ask the teacher to explain them " (Student 9), "I didn't always understand what I was supposed to do, so I would wait for my classmates to start before I joined " (Student 8).

When students do not fully understand the instructions, they become passive participants, waiting for their peers to start the activity before engaging themselves. This "wait and watch" behavior is common in online learning when students are unsure about the next step. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights that students often require "scaffolding" from teachers or more knowledgeable peers to fully engage with learning tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers could provide step-by-step instructions before each task begins and offer visual aids to reduce confusion. It may also be useful to provide a brief demo video for activities students are unfamiliar with. This "scaffolding" approach ensures that students are supported and can focus on active participation.

4.2.4 Speaking anxiety linked to participation in collaborative activities. While NEARPOD offers anonymity features in collaborative boards and polls, students still reported feeling anxious during specific speaking tasks. For many students, the process of speaking English in front of peers was a source of anxiety, even when their answers were not attached to their names. As Student 5 answered: "Even though some activities were anonymous, I still worried that people would see my mistakes". Moreover, Student 10 answer added more details: "When I had to speak in front of the whole class, I felt nervous, even if it was just a quick answer".

According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, anxiety acts as a "filter" that blocks language input from reaching the student's cognitive system (Krashen, 1982). Even when anonymity is provided, if students perceive that others can see or judge their performance, the affective filter remains active, preventing them from fully engaging. Teachers could provide pre-speaking activities that encourage students to rehearse or draft responses before speaking live. Creating a supportive environment where mistakes are normalized could also reduce anxiety.

4.2.5 Lack of personal feedback from teachers. Students also mentioned that they received limited personalized feedback from teachers while using NEARPOD. While real-time feedback from quizzes and polls was appreciated, students wanted more personalized feedback on their speaking skills, especially related to pronunciation and grammar. Student 11 shared that: "The feedback was okay, but I wish the teacher could tell me more about how to improve my speaking". Additionally, answer from Student 12: "I wanted feedback on how I was doing during the speaking activities, but it felt like the focus was only on the scores". Students often benefit from individualized feedback that provides actionable guidance.

Feedback models like Hattie and Timperley's (2007) Feedback Model argue that effective feedback must be timely, specific, and actionable. NEARPOD's feedback, while fast, may not be specific enough for students aiming to improve their spoken English skills. Teachers could incorporate personalized audio feedback or voice comments on collaborative board entries or recorded speaking tasks. Voice feedback would make the feedback process more human, timely, and meaningful for students.

While NEARPOD enhances engagement and confidence in speaking activities, students encounter several challenges that affect their experience. Technical issues, time constraints, complex instructions, and a lack of personalized feedback were the primary barriers. Each of these challenges highlights areas for improvement in the platform's functionality and in teacher support. Vygotsky's ZPD, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, and Hattie's Feedback Model provide theoretical support for addressing these barriers. By adopting changes like clearer instructions, pre-speaking activities, and personalized audio feedback, students' participation and speaking proficiency can be further improved.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The previous chapter presented the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews and observational notes to showcase the key findings of this research. This chapter aims to interpret and discuss these findings in relation to the research questions and the existing literature. The primary objective of this research was to explore how the use of the NEARPOD platform impacts the development of speaking skills among first-year EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. The themes discussed in this chapter highlight both the benefits and challenges students experienced while using NEARPOD. This discussion is guided by the six core themes: Increased Confidence, Improved Engagement, Challenges and Limitations, Changes in Attitudes Toward Speaking, Student Autonomy, and Feedback and Support. The findings are interpreted in the context of existing literature, and theoretical frameworks are applied to offer a deeper understanding of the outcomes.

Table 1

Summary of Findings on NEARPOD Features, Confidence Levels, and Technical Metrics

Category	Subcategories	Frequency
Nearpod features	Interactive Activities (Quizzes, Polls)	25
	Multimedia Integration (Videos, Images)	20
	Collaborative Tools	18
Confidence Levels	Increased Confidence in Speaking	15
	Moderate Confidence Improvement	12
	No Significant Confidence Change	8
Other Metrics	Technical Issues (Connectivity)	10
	Overall Satisfaction	22

5.1 Finding 1

One of the most significant findings of this study is the positive impact of NEARPOD on student confidence in speaking. Students reported that their fear of mistakes decreased as they engaged in NEARPOD activities, particularly because of the anonymous response option and the collaborative environment. This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that students with high anxiety have a "filter" that prevents language acquisition. By lowering their anxiety, NEARPOD allowed students to focus on communication rather than perfection. Student 4 stated, "NEARPOD helped me feel more relaxed when speaking English because I knew I could share my responses anonymously". This finding is consistent with previous studies by Tanveer (2007) and Hashemi (2011), who argued that anonymity and a supportive learning environment reduce anxiety and promote speaking confidence. By minimizing public judgment and encouraging open-ended participation, NEARPOD facilitated risk-taking behavior — a key aspect of language learning.

5.2 Finding 2

Student engagement in speaking activities was one of the most widely reported benefits of NEARPOD. Features like live quizzes, collaborative boards, and multimedia tools were cited as motivating and fun, encouraging students to participate actively. Students enjoyed the game-like aspects of NEARPOD, particularly the quizzes, as they introduced an element of healthy competition. Student 11 said that "The live quizzes were fun because I wanted to get a higher score than my classmates". As well, student 9 noted that "Collaborative boards allowed me to see how other students think and answer, which gave me ideas for how to express my thoughts". This is consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which argues that engagement increases when students feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. NEARPOD's use of interactive elements

aligns with this theory by promoting intrinsic motivation and increasing classroom participation. Research by Mayer (2001) also confirms that multimedia tools improve attention, thereby supporting student engagement in language activities.

5.3 Finding 3

While NEARPOD presented many benefits, several challenges and limitations were identified. These include technical issues, time constraints, complex instructions, and a lack of personalized feedback. Students frequently experienced technical issues such as slow internet connections, system freezes, and missed submissions due to connectivity problems. So, student 7 stated, "The only problem was when the internet was slow, and I missed some of the questions". These technical challenges reflect barriers identified by Muilenburg & Berge (2005), who found that technical issues are among the most common challenges in online learning environments. Interruptions caused by technical glitches can disrupt the flow of participation and increase student frustration.

Many students reported feeling rushed during live quizzes, particularly those with time limits. This aligns with Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988), which argues that cognitive overload occurs when students are required to process too much information under time constraints. Here Student 11 noted, "The time limits on quizzes made me anxious because I felt I had to think too quickly". Teachers may need to provide more time for quiz-based activities or offer the option to "retry" tasks to ensure students have a fair opportunity to engage. Another significant barrier to participation was unclear task instructions and student 9 said that "Sometimes the instructions were not clear, and I had to ask the teacher to explain them". According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD, 1978), students require "scaffolding" to understand new concepts and tasks. If instructions are vague, students must seek clarification from the teacher or their peers, leading to lost time. Visual instructions and tutorials can help overcome this issue.

5.4 Finding 4

Students' perspectives on speaking English changed significantly during their use of NEARPOD. Before using the platform, many students reported feeling anxious about speaking in front of others. However, after using NEARPOD, they began to view mistakes as part of the learning process rather than a source of embarrassment. Student 5 pointed out "I realized that making mistakes is part of learning. Now, I'm more relaxed and don't worry about small errors". This change is in line with the research by Krashen (1982), who noted that reducing anxiety allows for better language input. The shift in mindset also supports the concept of a "growth mindset" proposed by Dweck (2006), in which students believe they can improve through effort.

5.5 Finding 5

One of the unexpected outcomes of this study was the degree to which NEARPOD promoted student autonomy. By allowing students to respond at their own pace, practice anonymously, and make independent decisions, NEARPOD encouraged self-directed learning. The student 12 highlighted "With NEARPOD, I felt like I was responsible for my own learning because I had to make sure I kept up with the class". Autonomy in learning is a key aspect of Deci & Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that students become more engaged and self-regulated when they have autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the learning process. NEARPOD allowed students to control their learning pace, encouraging self-regulation and accountability.

5.6 Finding 6

Students highlighted the need for more personalized feedback from teachers while using NEARPOD. While NEARPOD provides real-time responses for quizzes and polls, students requested individual feedback on pronunciation and grammar. Student 11 commented that "I wish the teacher could tell me more about how to improve my speaking,

not just give me a score". This finding reflects Hattie & Timperley's (2007) Feedback Model, which emphasizes that effective feedback should be timely, specific, and actionable. Students appreciated the automatic feedback from quizzes but wanted more detailed, human feedback on their speaking ability. Teachers can address this challenge by using NEARPOD's voice notes or providing personalized audio feedback on student responses. The use of NEARPOD had a significant impact on the development of speaking skills among first-year EFL students. The analysis revealed that students experienced a range of benefits, such as increased confidence, higher engagement, and more positive attitudes toward speaking. However, there were also notable challenges, including technical issues, time constraints, and a lack of personalized feedback. These findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives such as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, and Hattie's Feedback Model. The challenges identified point to opportunities for improvement, such as better technical support, clearer instructions, and personalized feedback for speaking tasks. Addressing these areas will further support student engagement and participation. Future research could explore how teachers can customize NEARPOD's activities to meet the individual needs of EFL students. Additionally, follow-up studies could investigate the long-term impact of NEARPOD on speaking proficiency.

5.7 Conclusion

Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations showed that Nearpod helped students improve their speaking skills and confidence, but also presented challenges. Interactive features such as quizzes, polls, along with multimedia resources spurred active participation, making the platform engaging for students. These tools eased speaking anxiety by creating a compassionate setting. Collaborative tasks encouraged peer interaction along with practice. Variability in the effect on students' confidence was shown. The results showed this. Increased confidence in speaking was reported by a majority, although moderate

improvements were noted by some, in addition to no important change being experienced by a small group. Internet connectivity problems, along with other important technical issues, frequently disrupted the learning process, as further observations clearly showed.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

This chapter clearly explains how NEARPOD, a truly technology-driven platform, importantly helps first-year EFL students develop their speaking skills. Collaborative boards, live quizzes and multimedia tools importantly improved many students' speaking skill, engagement and confidence, according to the study. Technical issues, time constraints, along with unclear instructions caused important added stress, whereas many gamified features such as live quizzes and interactive polls increased student motivation greatly. Internet disruptions, limited quiz time and unclear instructions presented challenges in the study. More explicit instructions would reduce these issues. Extended quiz time along with access to technical support would also help. Importantly, future research recommendations, along with important implications for educators, students and policymakers, are suggested by the findings.

6.1 Implications of the Study

For first-year EFL students, this study investigates how NEARPOD, a digital learning platform, improves speaking instruction. This clearly shows the important benefits of anonymity, collaborative learning, real-time feedback, outstandingly clear instructions, self-regulation, as well as conquering speaking anxiety. NEARPOD allows educators to importantly increase student confidence, further encourage peer learning, as well as provide incredibly important real-time feedback. Many students use NEARPOD. This tool helps them learn and practice speaking independently. Policymakers and institutions must zero in on integrating digital learning platforms into the EFL curriculum, alongside offering teacher training in digital pedagogy, as well as investing in infrastructure and technical support. This study, unfortunately, suffers from several important limitations: a very small sample size—only twelve first-year EFL students from SDU University—a limited, single context, its

complete reliance on self-reported data and the ever-present possibility of bias in those self-reported responses. Triangulation, along with teacher feedback, as well as performance-based assessments, will validate findings in at least three future studies. Some students' technical problems with NEARPOD activities could negatively influence their overall experience, as well as skew their views of its effectiveness. A more stable learning environment for future studies will result from dealing with these issues.

6.2 Limitations and Further Recommendations

Several limitations, including a small sample size of 12 first-year EFL students from SDU University, a single-university context, reliance on self-reported data and potential bias in self-reported responses, were identified in the study on NEARPOD and EFL speaking skills. Technical problems importantly affected some students during NEARPOD activities, possibly affecting their opinions about how well it worked. Transparency and future research on NEARPOD and EFL speaking skills depend on dealing with these limitations. Researchers should importantly expand the sample size. This will help them better understand the effect of NEARPOD on EFL learning along with increased diversity. Researchers could measure changes in students' speaking skill using a mixed-methods approach. Researchers should thoroughly investigate the important long-term effects of NEARPOD on students' speaking expertise over extended periods. Dealing with technical challenges improves NEARPOD's practicality. Exploring teacher perspectives is important for achieving a truly complete comprehension of how NEARPOD importantly affects classroom dynamics.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Nazym Kenges, and I am conducting this interview as part of my research project titled 'The Development of 1st Year EFL Students' Speaking Skills Through the NEARPOD Platform.' The purpose of this study is to explore how the NEARPOD platform impacts the speaking skills of first-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students. This research aims to understand student perceptions, levels of engagement, and the challenges and benefits they experience while using the platform. The information we gather today will be used solely for academic research purposes, and your participation is entirely voluntary. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous in any reports or publications. You are free to withdraw from this interview at any point or skip any questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

This interview will last approximately 15-20 minutes, and with your permission, I may record our conversation to ensure accuracy. If at any time you would like me to stop the recording or you feel uncomfortable, please let me know. I will also be taking notes to ensure I fully capture your thoughts and perspectives. There are no right or wrong answers. I encourage you to share your honest thoughts, experiences, and feelings about using NEARPOD for speaking practice.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Is it alright if I record this interview for accuracy?

i. General Experience with English and NEARPOD

1. Can you tell me a little about your experience learning English as a foreign language?
2. How would you describe your experience using NEARPOD for speaking activities?

Key Features and Tools of NEARPOD

1. Which features of NEARPOD (e.g., collaborative boards, quizzes, polls) did you find most useful for improving your speaking skills?
2. Were there any features or aspects of NEARPOD that you found difficult or challenging?

ii. Confidence and Speaking Anxiety

1. Do you feel more confident in your speaking skills since using NEARPOD? Why or why not?
2. Did NEARPOD help reduce your speaking anxiety? How did it do that?

Section 4: Engagement and Motivation

2. Did you feel more engaged in speaking activities when using NEARPOD compared to traditional activities? Why?
3. How did NEARPOD change your attitude toward speaking English?

Section 5: Perceived Impact on Speaking Ability

1. How do you think NEARPOD has affected your overall speaking ability in English? Do you prefer using NEARPOD for speaking activities or traditional speaking tasks? Why?

Feedback and Suggestions for Improvement

- What suggestions would you make to improve NEARPOD as a tool for learning speaking skills?
- Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience using NEARPOD for speaking practice?