

Student Perceptions Toward The Use of AI-Mediated In English Speaking Performance at Tenth Grade SMAN 19 Tebo

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ABSTRACT

The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) in language education has provided new opportunities for students to practice English learning especially in speaking ability. This research explored what the students thought about speaking in English and whether or not they had positive opinions toward using AI-based learning to enhance their English speaking skill at the tenth grade of SMAN 19 Tebo. This research adopted a qualitative research design. Questionnaires and follow-up interviews with students who had used Replika AI as a tool for speaking practice were the methods of data collection. The findings indicated that students had different attitudes to speaking in English. Several students reported experiencing anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes when speaking in class. On the other hand, there were also some concerns regarding the tool's artificial intelligence design of Replika AI. The interaction with an AI-service app for all participants interacting with the AI application was associated with English practice on their own terms and without feeling judged. Moreover, the program generated an interactive context where the students could practice their conversations, and build their ideas more confidently. As has been elaborated above, the results showed that Replika AI was seen as a helpful instrument to practice English speaking and reduced students' anxiety of speaking. The study recommends that AI-mediated learning has the potential to be an alternative medium for speaking practice in the EFL context.

Keywords: AI-Mediated Learning; English Speaking Performance; Student Perceptions

Introduction

English is widely recognized as a global language, playing a crucial role in communication, education, and knowledge acquisition across various fields. In language learning, attaining competence in the four fundamental skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—is essential (Brown, 2001). Although these skills are interconnected, speaking is often regarded as the most demanding, as it requires learners to produce language spontaneously, organize ideas in real time, and respond to ongoing interactions. This challenge is particularly evident in EFL/ESL contexts, where learners frequently encounter specific difficulties in developing speaking proficiency (Richards, 2008). Unlike reading and writing, which allow for more time to process and revise language, speaking demands immediate production as well as psychological readiness. Therefore, learners need not only sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge but also confidence and emotional control during communication (Krashen, 1982). Due to its

multidimensional nature, speaking is considered one of the most difficult skills for many students to master.

However, the challenges of developing speaking skills become more pronounced in countries such as Indonesia, where English functions primarily as a foreign language. Despite the growing importance of English, many students have limited exposure to the language beyond the classroom and few opportunities to use it in meaningful communication. Consequently, learners often lack sufficient practice, feel unprepared, and experience anxiety when required to speak in real-life or classroom situations (Harmer, 2007; Putri & others, 2022). These conditions contribute to significant psychological barriers to speaking, among which fear of speaking is one of the most prominent and widely studied issues in language learning.

According to (Horwitz et al., 1986), foreign language anxiety as a unique complex of anxieties including the fear of communication in a foreign language, the concern of being evaluated negatively, and the anxiety related to taking tests. When speaking, students are often afraid to make mistakes, to be judged by their classmates or teachers, and to feel embarrassed. Because of this, they have a high chance of not taking part, being quiet in speaking drills, or having low motivation in the class. This phenomenon is fundamentally similar to the one described by Stephen Krashen's theory in his Affective Filter Hypothesis. Emotional factors, including anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, have been found to be important in second language acquisition (SLA) (Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 2013). High anxiety levels in learners raise their affective filter and though they receive the language input, they do not process it. As a result, students may have difficulty producing language, even if they have sufficient linguistic elements to do so. Learners in contrast should feel more at ease, more confident and more encouraged, so that their affective filter will be down, and language learning will be facilitated and their oral performance be better.

In the context of EFL learning, numerous studies have consistently highlighted speaking anxiety as a significant issue affecting students' performance. For instance, a study by (Teimouri et al., 2019) found that language anxiety has a strong negative correlation with students' achievement, indicating that higher anxiety levels can significantly hinder language performance. Similarly, research conducted by (Marwan, 2016) revealed that students experienced moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety, mainly caused by fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation. Furthermore, a study by (Tseng & others, 2021) emphasized that factors such as low self-confidence, lack of vocabulary, and limited exposure to English significantly contribute to students' speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms.

Compared to these previous studies, which mainly focus on identifying the causes and impacts of speaking anxiety, the present study not only explores the

contributing factors but also proposes a practical solution through the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-mediated learning, specifically Replika AI. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge the gap by addressing both the problem and the potential solution to enhance students' confidence and speaking performance. These findings consistently suggest that speaking anxiety is shaped by both internal such as self-confidence and fear of errors (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) and external (such as classroom environment and teaching method) variables (Idrus, 2022). Although contextual and participant differences existed in the studies, they all pointed to a clear pattern: students tended to feel anxious when they were asked to speak English, and that anxiety reduces their performance and involvement.

A similar situation was observed among tenth-grade students at SMAN 19 Tebo. Based on the researcher's preliminary observations, eight students exhibited a high level of speaking anxiety. They shared common characteristics, such as reluctance to participate in speaking activities, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and hesitation when expressing their ideas in English. These findings indicate that students' speaking performance and classroom participation are strongly influenced by psychological factors, particularly anxiety. In addition, it was found that students possess different learning styles, which further affect how they respond to speaking activities. These variations can be attributed to various factors such as cultural background, learning environment, and socio-economic status among others. Culturally, some students are from backgrounds where voicing opinion is not promoted that they tend to be shy and quiet in speaking tasks (Hofstede, 2001). Then again, other people are happier to take part, but they too are hindered by language barriers (Rois et al., 2025).

Given these difficulties, it is necessary to explore new and complementary strategies for supporting students to eliminate speaking anxiety. As the example of integration technology, specifically AI in language learning is increasingly gaining prominence. AI-based learning environments provide more interactive, flexible, and non-judgmental spaces where students can practice speaking without the fear of being evaluated by others (Huang & others, 2023; Kukulska-Hulme, 2020). Such settings could help relax players and make them feel more ease while practicing the language. In this process, the researcher use Replika AI as a means to conduct English speaking practice. Replika AI gives learners the opportunity to participate in small talk conversationally, which helps them practice articulating their thoughts, answering questions, and gaining fluency in a stress-free setting. Students are expected to increase their confidence gradually and alleviate their anxiety while talking English from this interaction.

Moreover, the integration of AI in teaching and learning of languages not only supports to overcome challenges of speaking, but also helps students' digital literacy skill development. Being digitally literate is a vital competence in today's

education. Interacting with AI enabled apps allows students to become more comfortable with technology in ways that support not only their language learning but also their preparation for future academic and professional demands (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). To address this issue, the present study aims to examine the factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety and to explore how Replika AI can help reduce anxiety, enhance confidence, and improve students' English-speaking performance. Specifically, this research investigates the underlying causes of learners' anxiety when speaking English and seeks to provide theoretical support for the use of Replika AI as a tool to alleviate anxiety and foster self-confidence, ultimately leading to better speaking outcomes. In addition, the study highlights the potential of AI as an alternative approach to addressing challenges commonly encountered in traditional EFL classrooms, the research questions are as follows:

1. What factors causes tenth grade students to feel anxious when speaking English in the classroom?
2. To what extent do students believe that Replika AI has contributed to their confidence in English speaking performance?

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative case study design to explore students' speaking anxiety and their attitudes toward AI-mediated learning using Replika AI in English speaking class. It was conducted at SMAN 19 Tebo with tenth grade students, chosen because students are allowed to use smartphones and English is taught three times a week. A total of 8 (eight) students were purposively selected as participants based on their speaking anxiety and experience using Replika AI. Their diverse cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and confidence levels make the setting suitable for examining speaking anxiety and engagement in AI-based learning.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' speaking anxiety and their perceptions of speaking practice using Replika AI, with questions based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Horwitz's Foreign Language Anxiety theory. Classroom observations were used to examine students' speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and their participation in AI-based speaking tasks, while document analysis included questionnaire responses, learning records, interview transcripts, and photos or videos to support data triangulation. For data analysis, the researcher first transcribed interviews with eight students and imported all data, observation notes, and Google Form responses into MAXQDA. The data were then coded into main themes such as speaking anxiety, perception of AI use, and confidence in speaking, along with relevant sub-codes. These codes were categorized into broader themes, such as factors causing

speaking anxiety and the role of Replika AI in improving speaking confidence. Finally, interpretation and triangulation were conducted by comparing findings across participants and supporting them with observation and questionnaire data to ensure consistency and answer the research questions.

Results and discussion

The data focus on students' perceptions of using Replika AI in speaking practice, particularly in relation to speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and their engagement in AI-mediated learning. The findings are organized into several themes to provide a deeper understanding of students' experiences and to answer the research questions.

1.1 Speaking Anxiety

The first theme discussed in this study is speaking anxiety, as it becomes one of the main factors influencing students' participation in English speaking activities. The analysis shows that speaking anxiety is clearly experienced by most of the students and becomes a major barrier in classroom participation. From the interview data, it can be seen that students tend to feel afraid, nervous, and unsure when they have to speak English, especially in front of others. Many of them are worried about making mistakes and being judged by their peers. The amouth data of Speaking Anxiety was presented as chart below :

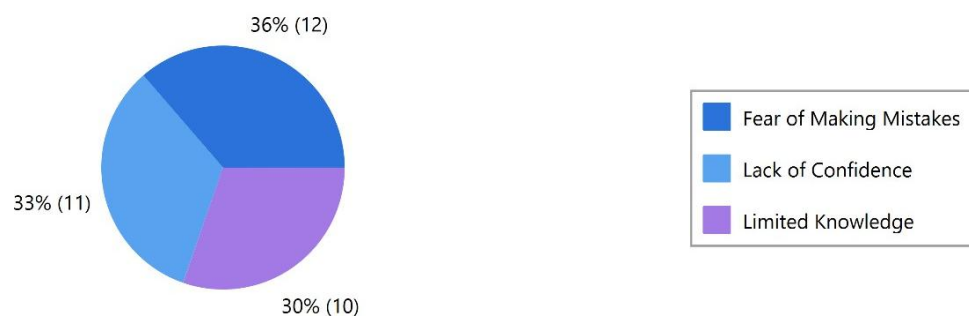


Figure 1. Distribution of Speaking Anxiety Factors
(N=8, based on interview codes)

Figure 1 illustrates that the result of the factors contributing to students' Speaking Anxiety as main code, where sub-code Fear of Making Mistakes dominates the data (36%), followed by Lack of Confidence (33%) and Limited Knowledge (30%). It was proved by the statement of Student 1 said, "*Saya takut salah ngomong inggris karena belum terbiasa jadinya gugup,*" while Student 3 expressed, "*Saya tahu mau ngomong apa, tapi susah menyampaikannya dalam bahasa Inggris karena takut salah.*" In addition, Student

4 mentioned, “Kadang saya gugup, ga pede karna medok (L1 (Javanese) accent pronunciation interference).”

These responses show that students are not only struggling with language ability but also with their emotional readiness. Overall, it can be understood that speaking anxiety in this context is influenced by a combination of fear, lack of confidence, and limited language mastery, which aligns with the idea of foreign language anxiety proposed by (Horwitz et al., 1986).

1.2 Perception of AI-used

The second theme discussed in this study is students’ perception of AI use, particularly the use of Replika AI in English speaking practice. Based on the findings, students show positive responses toward the use of Replika AI as a tool for practicing English speaking. The amouth data of Perception of AI used was presented as chart below :

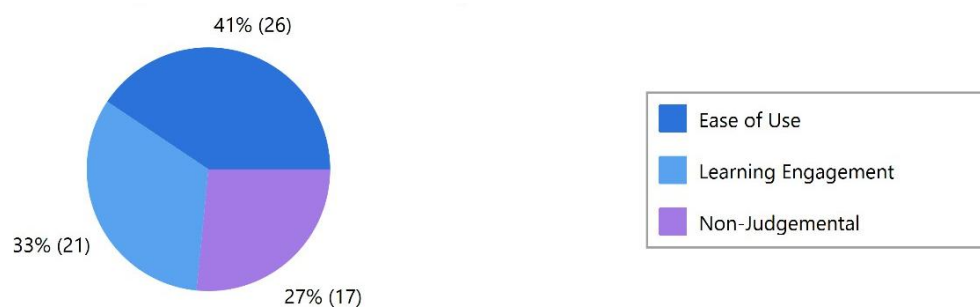


Figure 2. Perception of AI-used

Figure 2 illustrates that the result of student Perception of AI-used, namely Replika AI as main code, where the sub-code Ease of Use dominates the data (41%), followed by Learning Engagement (33%) and student feels Non Judgemental Environment (27%) when they were using Replika AI during English speaking class.

Most students feel that using AI is more comfortable compared to speaking directly in the classroom. They perceive AI as a safe space where they can practice without pressure. For instance, Student 5 stated, “*Lebih nyaman ngomong sama AI karena tidak takut dinilai,*” and Student 6 said, “*Kalau sama AI saya tidak malu, jadi lebih berani mencoba.*” From these responses, it can be seen that students value the flexibility and non- judgmental nature of AI interaction. The researcher found that students tend to be more active and willing to try when they use AI compared to when they speak in front of their peers. Therefore, AI is not only seen as a technological tool but also as a medium that makes students feel more open to practicing English.

1.3 Confidence in Speaking

The third theme discussed in this study is confidence in speaking, as it plays an important role in students' willingness to communicate in English. In terms of confidence, the results show that students experience a gradual improvement after using Replika AI. The amount data of Confidence in Speaking was presented as chart below :

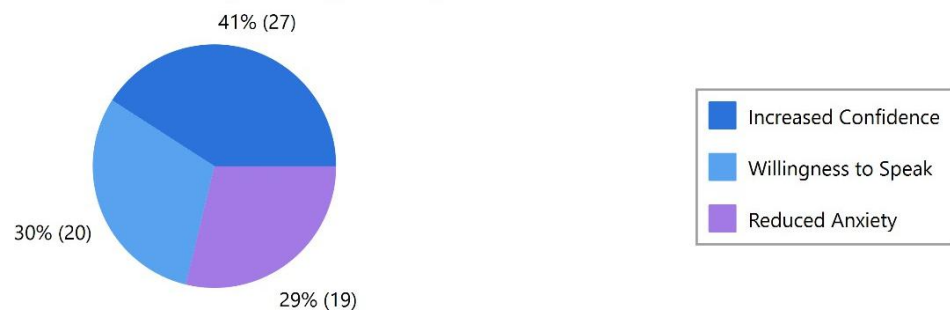


Figure 3. Confidence in Speaking

Figure 4 illustrates the result of Confidence in Speaking main code, where sub-code Increased Confidence felt by students dominates the data (41%), followed by Willingness To Speak (30%) and Reduced Anxiety (29%). Many students reported that they feel more confident and less nervous when speaking English. For example, Student 2 stated, "*Setelah latihan pakai AI, saya jadi lebih percaya diri,*" while Student 7 mentioned "*Lebih lancar karena sering latihan sama AI.*"

These responses indicate that repeated practice in a non judgemental environment helps students build their confidence. The researcher observed that students became more willing to participate and showed less hesitation when speaking. When anxiety is reduced, students become more open to expressing their ideas. This finding is also supported by (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), who explains that lower anxiety can increase willingness to communicate.

Conclusion

From the overall findings, it can be concluded that speaking anxiety is a key issue that affects students' performance and participation in English speaking activities. However, the use of Replika AI provides a practical solution by creating a more comfortable and supportive environment for students to practice. The students' positive perceptions toward AI contribute to reducing their anxiety and increasing their confidence. As a result, they become more willing to speak and participate in classroom activities. Based on these findings, it is suggested that

teachers consider integrating AI-based tools such as Replika AI into speaking activities to create a more relaxed and engaging learning environment. Teachers should also guide students in using the technology effectively so that it supports their learning process.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed for teachers, students, schools, and future researchers in order to improve the effectiveness of English speaking learning through AI-mediated tools such as Replika AI. These suggestions are expected to help reduce students' speaking anxiety, increase their confidence, and create a more supportive learning environment.

1. English teachers are suggested to integrate AI-based tools such as Replika AI into speaking activities to reduce students' speaking anxiety and improve their confidence in speaking English. By providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment, students can practice speaking more comfortably and actively participate in classroom discussions.
2. Students are encouraged to use Replika AI as an additional speaking partner outside the classroom to practice English more frequently. Regular practice can help them reduce fear of making mistakes and increase their willingness to communicate in English.
3. Schools are suggested to support the implementation of AI-mediated learning by providing better access to digital resources.
4. Future researchers are suggested to conduct similar studies with a larger number of participants or in different educational contexts to gain broader findings regarding the effectiveness of AI-based tools in improving students' speaking skills.

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Author Biographies



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Her academic interests include English Language Teaching, speaking anxiety, classroom management, and the use of Artificial Intelligence in language learning. She is also actively involved in online anthropology writing events and scientific article publication as part of her commitment to academic development and educational innovation.



Merry Dewan Dita was born in Kulon Progo one of the districts in the Special Region of Yogyakarta Province. She earned her bachelor's degree in English Language Education from Karangturi National University, Semarang. She currently works as an Academic Administration Officer at the same institution, where she is actively involved in supporting academic processes and student services. Her academic interests focus on the use of technology in education, an area she continues to explore through ongoing research for her thesis.

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