PERCEPTIONS OF NOVICE LEARNERS TOWARD THE USE OF AI IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILL

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceptions of novice university students toward the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in developing English speaking skills. This qualitative study aims to investigate how novice learners perceive the role of AI in supporting their English speaking practice. The participants of this study were 10 novice learners of English Education Study Program who were determined by purposive sampling among 22 students who enrolled the Speaking for Informal Interaction Course. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews which were then analyzed by identifying themes related to learners' perceptions of AI integration in speaking activities. The findings showed that in general the learners had positive view toward the use of AI in enhancing their speaking skills. They reported that AI tools provided opportunities for more frequent speaking practice, immediate feedback on pronunciation, and greater confidence in expressing their ideas. However, there are challenges noted, such as limited interaction quality compared to human communication. Overall, this study indicated that the integration of AI in speaking activities can support novice English learners in improving their speaking competence, confidence and engagement.
Keywords: Artificial Intelligent; speaking skills; novice learners

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly transformed various fields, including education, by offering personalized and interactive learning opportunities that were not possible in traditional settings. In the field of language education, AI-powered applications such as chatbots, speech recognition systems, and automated pronunciation feedback have been increasingly integrated into teaching and learning practices (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). These tools provide unique advantages by enabling learners to engage in real-time interaction, receive immediate feedback, and practice autonomously, all of which are essential for mastering oral communication skills. The integration of AI into language education reflects broader global demands, as English proficiency continues to play a critical role in academic, professional, and social mobility in today's interconnected world.

Among the four language skills, speaking is often identified as the most challenging to acquire, particularly for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Brown (2007) defines speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing,

receiving, and processing information. Similarly, Nunan (1991) highlights that speaking requires learners not only to express themselves fluently but also to communicate appropriately in diverse contexts. Scholars further emphasize that speaking goes beyond the accurate production of words and sentences. Harmer (2007) points out that successful speaking involves mastery of language features, the ability to process language in real time, and effective interaction skills. Thornbury (2005) underlines the importance of both fluency and accuracy, while Luoma (2004) stresses that speaking is a complex skill requiring careful attention to content, form, and interaction. Collectively, these perspectives reveal that developing speaking skills demands both linguistic competence and communicative ability, making it one of the most demanding aspects of language learning.

For novice learners, the challenges of speaking in English are particularly acute. Limited vocabulary, lack of fluency, and low self-confidence often hinder learners' ability to participate actively in oral communication (Richards, 2015). Anxiety is also a significant barrier, with many learners perceiving speaking as a high-risk activity due to fear of making mistakes or being negatively evaluated by peers and teachers. In this regard, AI-based applications offer promising solutions. Intelligent tutoring systems, mobile applications, and conversational chatbots provide a low-anxiety environment in which learners can practice speaking without the fear of judgment. These tools also allow repeated practice and supply immediate corrective feedback, which are crucial for the development of pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency (Chiu, 2021; Mohammadkarimi, 2024).

Empirical studies further demonstrate the potential benefits of AI in supporting speaking development. Du & Daniel (2024), in their systematic review, concluded that AI-powered chatbots can serve as conversational partners, feedback providers, and resource suppliers, while effectively reducing speaking anxiety and increasing learners' willingness to communicate. Similarly, Grab (2025) found that sustained interaction with AI chatbots significantly improved fluency, grammar accuracy, vocabulary use, pronunciation, and speaking confidence among undergraduate learners. Ericsson & Johansson (2023) reported that lower secondary students who engaged with conversational AI over four months sustained their motivation and benefited from repeated practice opportunities, especially low-proficiency learners and female students. These findings highlight

that conversational AI can bridge the gap between explicit language knowledge and communicative competence by providing accessible, personalized, and motivating speaking practice.

Despite these advances, some limitations of AI integration in speaking practice remain. Godwin-Jones (2021) notes that while AI applications offer adaptive learning tailored to learners' proficiency levels, they may fall short in simulating authentic human interaction, which is critical for meaningful communication. Similarly, Ebadi et al. (2025) argue that while AI fosters learner motivation and autonomy, questions remain about its long-term effectiveness in cultivating authentic communicative competence. These concerns suggest that while AI is a valuable supplement to traditional instruction, it cannot yet fully replace human interaction in language learning. Therefore, research must continue to explore how AI can be effectively integrated into pedagogical practices, particularly for learners at the beginning stages of language acquisition.

Given this context, the present study seeks to explore novice learners' perceptions of using AI to develop their speaking skills. While prior studies have documented the effectiveness of AI chatbots and applications in enhancing oral proficiency, little is known about how beginner-level learners in higher education perceive these technologies and how such perceptions shape their motivation, confidence, and engagement. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for designing effective, learner-centered approaches that integrate AI into language learning. The findings of this study are expected to contribute insights into how AI can support the development of speaking skills among novice learners, offering practical implications for educators, researchers, and technology developers in higher education contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative design to explore novice learners' perceptions of using AI in speaking practice. The focus was to identify learners' views regarding the advantages and challenges of AI integration.

The participants were 10 novice learners among 22 students who enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar. Purposive sampling was used to select students who had beginner-level proficiency and were introduced to AI-based speaking tools during their classes.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants.

The interviews explored students' experiences, opinions, and reflections on practicing speaking with AI tools. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which involved coding, categorizing, and identifying themes related to students' perceptions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
AI for Pronunciation Practice

Most students reported that AI tools were especially helpful for improving pronunciation. They appreciated that AI could repeat words or sentences clearly and provide instant corrections. One student explained, *"When I practice with AI, I can listen many times and then try again. It is not shy because AI never laugh at me."* Another added, *"AI helped me to pronounce difficult words like 'environment' and 'technology.' I felt more confident to say them in class."*

AI for Confidence Building

Students highlighted that using AI reduced their anxiety in speaking English. Practicing with AI felt safer than speaking directly in front of classmates or teachers. A participant shared, *"I was afraid to speak English in class. But with AI, I can talk again and again until I feel ready. It makes me more brave."* Another noted, *"Before, I only spoke a little English. Now I speak more because AI gives me chance to practice without pressure."*

AI for Vocabulary and Fluency

Learners also said that AI introduced them to new words and helped them speak more smoothly. One participant stated, *"AI gives me new vocabulary. When I forget a word, AI tells me the word. Then I can use it in my speaking."* Another remarked, *"I use AI to make sentences. It helps me to speak faster, not stop too long."*

Challenges in Using AI

Despite the benefits, some learners identified limitations. They pointed out that AI lacked the warmth of real human interaction. A student commented, *"AI cannot give feeling like my friend. Sometimes I want real conversation."* Another added, *"The internet connection is not always good, so I cannot always use AI."*

Overall Perceptions

In general, students perceived AI as a useful support for developing speaking skills. They believed it was not a replacement for human interaction but a valuable complement to classroom practice. As one student concluded, *"AI is like a partner. It helps me practice at home, then I can speak better in class."*

The findings indicate that novice learners generally have positive perceptions of AI in developing their speaking skills. These results are consistent with prior research suggesting that AI enhances speaking fluency and learner confidence (Chiu et al., 2021).

The role of immediate feedback provided by AI aligns with (Ellis, 2009) perspective on corrective feedback as a critical factor in second language acquisition. Students in this study valued pronunciation feedback, which echoes the findings of (Huang, 2022) who emphasized AI's effectiveness in supporting accuracy.

Furthermore, the increased confidence reported by students supports Godwin-Jones' (2021) argument that AI fosters learner autonomy. By practicing independently, learners develop self-assurance before engaging in real conversations. However, the challenge of limited natural interaction reflects concerns expressed by Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019), who note that AI cannot fully replace human communication in language learning.

These findings suggest that AI can be best used as a complementary tool in speaking instruction. Teachers may integrate AI for practice and feedback, while still providing authentic human interaction in class discussions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that novice learners perceive AI positively in supporting the development of their speaking skills. AI tools provide more frequent practice, immediate feedback, and increased confidence, although they cannot fully replace human interaction. The results imply that AI should be integrated as a complementary support to classroom speaking activities. Educators are encouraged to combine AI applications with interactive learning methods to maximize both the linguistic and communicative aspects of speaking.

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