

EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH THE LEARNA AI APPLICATION IN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstrak

This study aims to explore and describe the role of the Learn AI application in building the confidence of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students in speaking English, as well as how students' interaction with the application affects the learning process of speaking. The background of this research is that there are significant challenges in mastering English speaking skills among Indonesian students, which is often caused by less engaging teaching methods and lack of interaction. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. The subjects of this study are the principal, three teachers, and three students from Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Huda. The results of the study show that the Learn AI application significantly contributes to improving students' speaking skills and confidence. The app provides interactive features, conversation simulations, and automatic pronunciation correction that allow students to practice independently without fear of being wrong or negatively judged. This successfully overcomes psychological barriers such as embarrassment and anxiety, so that students become more courageous and active in speaking in class. However, automated feedback still has limitations, especially regarding the local context and technical understanding of students, so the role of teachers remains important to provide clarification and guidance. The conclusion of this study is that the integration of AI technology, such as the Learn AI application, is an effective strategic step in improving the quality of English learning and building student confidence more optimally.

Keywords: Speaking Skills, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), Learn AI

INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization has brought new dynamics in various aspects of life, especially in the fields of communication, education, and professionalism. Language is the main key to bridging cultural differences and backgrounds between individuals and nations. In this context, English has a very important role and cannot be ignored. As an international language, English is the main means of expanding access to knowledge, strengthening global interaction, and supporting the achievement of national education goals.

The concept of *Global English* emerged as a widely accepted form of English as the standard of international communication. While not fully representative of the diversity of English variations around the world, *Global English* continues to evolve as a shared convention that facilitates cross-cultural communication. The adoption of this standard by various countries and international organizations shows how important English is as a tool to strengthen cooperation, both in the academic and professional fields. Thus, English proficiency is an urgent need in facing increasingly complex global challenges.

The importance of mastering English is increasingly felt in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, when global information disclosure presents opportunities as well as great challenges for society. This era allows for cross-world communication that plays an important role in self-development in various fields, including business and education. Therefore, English language skills are the main key to facing global competition, so learning must be carried out from an early age to the university level.

Of the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, speaking skills have a very high urgency. Speaking is an individual activity in conveying a message orally to the listener. Salamah (2022) explained that speaking is the ability to pronounce sounds or articulate words to express, convey, and channel thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

In line with this, Saptoto et al., (2024) define speaking as the process of expressing, explaining, and conveying opinions, ideas, and feelings to others through understandable spoken language. In fact, Unsi (2020) emphasized that speaking skills are one of the language skills that develop after listening skills. Thus, speaking is not just the pronunciation of words, but a system of signs that can be heard and understood, and involves the coordination of various organs of the body to convey ideas in a structured manner.

Speaking skills have an important role because they are the main means of building communication. This makes it one of the most needed competencies in entering the world of work.

Based on the English Proficiency Index (EPI) report, out of 2.3 million respondents worldwide, Singapore obtained the highest score of 66.82, followed by the Philippines with a score of 60.14 and Malaysia with 58.56. Meanwhile, in 2022, Indonesia ranked 51st out of 88 countries with a score of 51.58, down from 2021 which reached 52.14. This position places Indonesia in 13th place out of 21 countries in Asia, with an achievement that is still below the average level of English proficiency in the Asian region, which is 53.94 (Hamsa et al., 2024).

Various factors are the causes of students' difficulty mastering speaking skills in English. One of the main factors is anxiety when speaking, which impacts their ability and confidence in communication. Research by Pertiwi (2024) shows that learners often experience physical symptoms such as increased heart rate, feelings of inadequacy, and panic. In addition, they also face fear in communication, anxiety during exams, fear of negative evaluations, and discomfort when using English in public speaking activities. This is in line with the findings of Ashari, (2021) who emphasized that confidence is a key factor in speaking skills.

A similar phenomenon also occurred to students of Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Huda in Dasuk, Sumenep, which is the location of this research. Based on the results of observation for three months (September-October 2024), it is known that students tend to be passive in English lessons. They pay less attention to the teacher's explanations, often chat, and tend to be silent or embarrassed when asked to speak. The average value of students' speaking skills is still below the KKM, which is 65.18. This condition shows that students have difficulties in communicating and processing the information obtained. These obstacles are mostly due to the lack of practice opportunities and the use of conventional learning methods that do not support students' active involvement.

Seeing the importance of speaking skills and the challenges faced by students, innovation in learning methods is needed. Technological developments, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI), offer promising solutions. AI is defined as a simulation of human intelligence applied to machines to create intelligent systems. This definition is emphasized by Abdillah & Hayadi (2021) who state that AI is a branch of computer science that focuses on the automation of intelligent behavior, with implementation that must be based on strong theory. Meanwhile, Gleneagles et al., (2024) explain that AI is the ability of a system or machine to mimic tasks that generally require human intelligence, such as natural language processing, pattern recognition, and decision-making.

In the context of language learning, Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be used as a means to improve student efficiency, engagement, and learning outcomes. The use of AI in English teaching continues to grow and presents new opportunities to create a more personalized and adaptive learning experience. Wang and Hu (2020) emphasized that AI technology is now being used to help the learning process, improve communication, and provide feedback to students.

A number of studies have proven the effectiveness of AI in language learning. Li and Liang (2019) explain that AI-based platforms support vocabulary mastery, reading comprehension, and overall language proficiency. The platform's adaptive and personalization features allow learners to practice in a targeted manner and get feedback tailored to their needs, resulting in a more effective and efficient learning experience. In addition, interaction with virtual tutors and AI-based chatbots has been proven to be able to improve speaking skills while fostering students' confidence in using English in everyday contexts. AI-based speech recognition technology has also shown significant

results in improving students' pronunciation skills. Liu and Kong (2019) found that learners who used speech recognition technology experienced a marked improvement in accuracy and fluency in pronunciation. The real-time feedback provided by the AI system helps students detect and correct pronunciation errors, resulting in clearer and more precise pronunciation of English.

The results of observations and interviews with English teachers at MA Nurul Huda show that students are quite adaptive to the use of technology. After trying learning methods with supporting media such as the Lerna AI application, students showed a significant improvement in English speaking skills. Through the use of this application, students become more active in asking questions about English material and even dare to ask questions in English. This indicates the common thread of the main problem faced by students, namely the need to update learning methods. The Lerna AI application, as a form of visual intelligence, can be a relevant and effective solution because it is able to provide an interactive and personalized learning environment and increase students' confidence in communicating.

By considering the existing problems and the potential for artificial intelligence (AI)-based solutions, this research is very relevant to be conducted. Therefore, the researcher is interested in raising a study entitled *"Engaging in Speaking English As A Foreign Language (EFL) Students Through Visual Intelligence"* which focuses on testing the effectiveness of the use of AI, especially the Lerna AI application, in improving students' English speaking skills.

The results of A'ini & Khoiriyah's (2024) research show that AI-based chatbots have great potential to transform the world of education through a more personalized learning experience, increased student involvement, and the provision of more efficient evaluations. In line with that, Asad et al., (2024) also found that the use of ChatGPT in English writing pedagogy provides significant potential in supporting learning.

Based on some of the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that student involvement in speaking skills through the use of artificial intelligence is very important to be studied further. Therefore, this research was conducted under the title *"Engaging in Speaking English As A Foreign Language (EFL) Students Through Visual Intelligence."*

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study model (Moleong, 2007 & Creswell & Poth, 2016) to explore the speaking skills constraints of EFL students which are generally due to limited vocabulary, nervousness, and lack of practice opportunities. AI was chosen as an alternative medium because it is able to provide interactive conversation simulations, instant feedback, and help reduce student anxiety. Researchers play a role as the main instrument in planning, implementation, data collection and analysis, and reporting results. The location of the research was MA Nurul Huda Dasuk, Sumenep, with the subject of the principal, three English teachers, and three students who were selected purposively. Data were obtained through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed with models (Miles & Huberman, 2007) through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawn. The validity of the data is guaranteed by triangulating sources, methods, and documents so that the research results are credible, reflective, and make a practical contribution to improving English speaking skills through the use of artificial intelligence.

FINDINGS

This study found that the speaking skills of EFL students at MA Nurul Huda Dasuk Sumenep are still low due to limited vocabulary, nervousness, and lack of opportunities to practice. This is reflected in the average value of speaking skills which is still below the KKM (65.18). This condition is in line with the research of Ashari (2021) which highlights the importance of the confidence factor in speaking skills, but is different from the findings of Li & Liang (2019) who affirm that AI-based platforms are able to directly improve students' vocabulary mastery and speaking skills.

Through the application of the Lerna AI application, students show significant changes. They start to be more active, dare to ask questions in English, and experience increased confidence when speaking. These findings support the research of A'ini & Khoiriyah (2024) on the effectiveness of AI chatbots in increasing student engagement, but make a new contribution by emphasizing the use of visual intelligence in the context of madrasas. Thus, this study confirms that the use of AI can be a practical and relevant solution in English learning at the intermediate level.

Table 1. Summary of Research Findings

Aspects	Initial Conditions (Before AI)	Conditions After Using AI (Lerna AI)	Comparison with Previous Studies
Speaking skills	Average score of 65.18 (below MOH)	Improved and smoother	In contrast to Li & Liang (2019) who emphasized vocabulary improvement
Confidence	Low, students tend to be nervous and passive	More confident, dare to ask questions in English	In line with Ashari (2021) about the importance of self-confidence
Student engagement	Passive, less attentive, more silent	Active, participate in class discussions	Supporting A'ini (2024) on engagement through AI
Learning methods	Conventional, minimal speaking practice	Interactive with conversation simulation and instant feedback	New contributions to the context of madrasas

Table 1 shows a comparison of students' conditions before and after the application of the Lerna AI application in learning English speaking skills. In terms of speaking skills, students initially had an average score of 65.18 which was still below the KKM, thus showing low ability to express ideas orally. After using Lerna AI, students show improved speaking fluency as they get used to practicing through interactive conversation simulations and instant feedback. This finding is different from the research of Li & Liang (2019) which emphasizes more on improving vocabulary, while this study shows a focus on speaking skills in the context of madrasas.

In terms of confidence, the initial condition of students is characterized by nervousness, tendency to be passive, and reluctant to speak. But after using AI, students become more confident and even dare to ask questions in English. This is in line with Ashari (2021) who emphasizes the importance of confidence in speaking skills.

The aspect of student involvement has also changed. At first, students do not pay attention to the lesson, talk a lot, and are silent when asked to speak. After the implementation of Lerna AI, students are more active, enthusiastic, and engaged in discussions. These findings support A'ini & Khoiriyah (2024) who found that AI, particularly chatbots, can increase student engagement in learning.

In terms of learning methods, the previous conventional approach was less effective because of the lack of speaking practice. With AI, learning becomes more interactive through conversation simulations, voice recognition, and instant feedback. The contribution of this research lies in its application in the context of madrasas, which was rarely discussed in previous research.

DISCUSSION

A. The role of Learna AI applications in building EFL students' confidence in speaking English

1. Boosts Confidence

Based on the results of the interviews, the majority of informants stated that the use of the Learna AI application had a positive impact on increasing their confidence in speaking English. Informant M. Thoriq said, *"Yes, I feel more confident. Because with this app I can practice anytime without fear of being laughed at. The more you try, the less nervous you get."* This phrase suggests that the app provides a safe space for students to practice independently without social pressure, so that fear and awkwardness can be reduced. In line with that, Nanda Irawan admitted, *"Yes, after practicing using this application a lot, I became more courageous. Because I can practice on my own without anyone laughing, so when in class I am more confident to answer."* This statement confirms that the opportunity to practice independently encourages students to be more prepared to perform in the classroom.

This phenomenon is in line with the theory put forward by Brown (2007), which states that confidence is one of the important affective factors that affect the success of language learning. A learning environment that is safe from stress can help students reduce *language anxiety* and encourage them to be more courageous in communicating. In this context, the Learna AI application presents a private space that suppresses negative psychological factors, such as shyness, fear of being wrong, and nervousness, as also said by Irma Rahmawati: *"Yes, I feel more confident. Because I can practice on my own at home, so when in class I am not too afraid of making mistakes."*

The findings of this study are also strengthened by the results of previous studies. For example, research conducted by Derakhshan, Khalili, & Beheshti (2016) states that conversation-simulation-based technology is able to reduce the level of *speaking anxiety* and significantly increase EFL students' confidence in communicating. Likewise, the results of research by Tsai & Talley (2014) showed that the use of AI-based interactive applications provides opportunities to practice repeatedly, thereby increasing students' courage to speak in class.

Thus, it can be concluded that the increase in students' confidence in speaking English through the Learna AI application arises not only due to technical aspects such as the interactive conversation feature, but also because the application is able to provide a comfortable learning atmosphere, free from social pressure, and allow for intensive self-practice. This supports affective theory in language learning while reinforcing empirical evidence from previous research that technology, especially AI applications, can play an effective role in overcoming students' psychological barriers, especially insecurity.

2. Reducing Psychological Barriers

The results show that before using the Learna AI app, the students often faced significant psychological barriers when it came to speaking in English. Informant Nanda Irawan said, *"Before this application, I usually felt nervous and afraid of saying the wrong thing. Sometimes I am also confused about where to start when asked in English."* Similarly, Irma Rahmawati said, *"In the past, I often felt ashamed and afraid of making mistakes. Sometimes I get more silent than I try to talk."* Meanwhile, M. Thoriq added, *"Before using the application, I usually feel awkward and afraid of pronouncing the wrong word. Sometimes it's also embarrassing to have to speak in front of friends."*

These three statements indicate that the main obstacle for students does not lie in the linguistic aspect alone, but rather in affective factors such as *anxiety*, fear of being wrong, nervousness, and shame. This is in line with the findings of Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) in the theory of *Foreign Language Anxiety*, which explains that language anxiety can inhibit communication processes, make students passive, and even reduce their chances of practicing.

But after using the Lerna AI application, these psychological obstacles gradually decreased. M. Thoriq admitted, *"Yes, I feel more confident. Because with this app I can practice anytime without fear of being laughed at. The more you try, the less nervous you get."* The same thing was also expressed by Irma Rahmawati who stated that independent practice at home made her no longer too afraid of making mistakes when speaking in class.

These findings are in line with the research of Zhang (2019) who found that the use of *Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) applications* was able to lower the anxiety levels of EFL students because students were able to practice in a safe and private setting. Likewise, the results of a study by Liu & Jackson (2008), which confirmed that a learning environment without social pressure can reduce psychological barriers and encourage students to speak more actively.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Lerna AI application not only acts as a technical medium to practice speaking skills, but also as a *psychological buffer* that helps students overcome affective barriers such as shyness, fear of being wrong, and awkward. This factor then contributes greatly to the increase in students' active participation in English language learning, both inside and outside the classroom.

3. Practicing Fluency and Spontaneity

One of the important findings in this study is that the use of the Lerna AI application helps students practice *fluency* and *spontaneity* in speaking English. Informant Irma Rahmawati said, *"The interactive conversation feature. With that feature, I feel like I'm chatting live, so I'm used to answering quickly."* In line with that, Nanda Irawan also said, *"Real-time conversation feature. Because I feel like I'm talking to a real person, so I'm more used to it and finally less nervous."* This is reinforced by M. Thoriq's statement saying, *"The automatic conversation feature is the most helpful in my opinion. I can talk immediately and get a response as if I were talking to a real person. It makes me more courageous to try again and again."*

These three statements show that real-time interactive conversation exercises make students trained to respond spontaneously, without thinking too long or fear of making mistakes. This is in line with the *Communicative Competence* theory of Canale & Swain (1980), which emphasizes that fluency and the ability to respond quickly are integral parts of communication skills in a second language. With the existence of a conversation simulation, students not only practice the structure of language, but also become familiar with the dynamics of real communication.

In addition, the impact of intensive practice through the app is also seen in the students' fluent speech. M. Thoriq emphasized, *"I feel more courageous to speak in front of the class, more fluently, and not stop to think words too often"*. The same thing was conveyed by Nanda Irawan, *"I am now more fluent in answering teachers' questions, the vocabulary used is also more, and I don't think too long before speaking"*. These two statements confirm that the use of applications has a direct impact on improving speaking fluency and the use of more diverse vocabulary.

These findings are in line with the research of Nation (2007), which states that *fluency development* can be improved through repetitive and intensive exercise under conditions that resemble real communication. Similarly, the results of Godwin-Jones' (2018) study show that AI-based applications that provide real-time conversations are able to improve EFL students' fluency because students are more accustomed to responding quickly and naturally.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Lerna AI application plays a significant role in training students' fluency and spontaneity. The real-time conversation feature provides a learning experience that resembles direct interaction with a native speaker, allowing students to speak faster, more fluently, and more confidently. This also proves that the integration of

AI technology in language learning can strengthen the communicative aspect of students who were previously hampered by nervousness and limited practice in the classroom.

4. Increase Vocabulary and Speaking Fluency

The results show that the use of the Learn AI application not only helps students speak more fluently, but also enriches the vocabulary they use in daily communication. Informant Nanda Irawan said, *"Yes, obviously. I am now more fluent in answering teachers' questions, the vocabulary used is also more, and I don't think too long before speaking."* The same thing was conveyed by M. Thoriq, *"I feel more courageous to speak in front of the class, more fluently, and not stop to think words too often"*. This statement shows that the intensity of training through the app has an impact on improving speaking fluency as well as the ability to use more varied vocabulary.

In addition, Irma Rahmawati added, *"I have become more courageous to answer teachers' questions in English, even though it is not very fluent, but more confident than before"*. This phrase confirms that although students' fluency in speaking is still in the developing stage, applications still have a significant influence on expanding vocabulary as well as increasing their courage to try to speak.

This finding is in accordance with the view of Nation (2001), who explains that vocabulary mastery is one of the main pillars in improving speaking skills, in addition to the fluency aspect. The more vocabulary mastered, the easier it will be for students to express ideas without having to pause long to find the right word. This is reinforced by the theory of *the Input Hypothesis* from Krashen (1985), which emphasizes the importance of *exposure* to the target language to enrich vocabulary and facilitate communication.

In line with that, previous research has also provided similar evidence. For example, a study conducted by Lin & Warschauer (2015) found that interactive technology-based applications can significantly expand students' vocabulary through intensive and repetitive practice. Similarly, research by Godwin-Jones (2018) shows that the use of AI-based conversational apps helps EFL students improve their speaking fluency as they are used to responding quickly to new vocabulary that arises in the context of conversation.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Learn AI application plays an important role in improving fluency while enriching students' vocabulary. Through interactive conversation-based exercises, students not only get used to speaking fluently, but also acquire new vocabulary contextually. This proves that AI technology can be an effective means of strengthening students' linguistic and communicative aspects, so that they are better prepared to face real communication situations in English.

B. Students' interaction with Learn AI applications affects the process of learning to speak English

1 Relevance to the Subject Matter

Based on the results of the interviews, the informants emphasized that the use of the Learn AI application is directly related to the material learned in class. For example, M. Thoriq said: *"This app is helpful because there are speaking exercises with various topics that are appropriate to the subject matter. So I can repeat the material while practicing it right away."* (Interview, May 1, 2025). This is reinforced by Irma Rahmawati's statement which said: *"This application helps me repeat lessons in a practical way. So I didn't just read the theory, but immediately tried to speak."* In line with that, Nanda Irawan also added that the conversation exercises on the application are relevant to what is learned at school, so that he can directly practice the material that has been learned.

These findings show that the Learn AI application is not just an additional medium, but also a means of strengthening learning in the classroom. This is in line with

the view of Richards & Rodgers (2001) in *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* which emphasizes that speaking skills in language learning must be linked to real context and relevant material in order for students to be able to apply language functionally. Thus, the use of AI-based applications that provide topics according to learning materials is able to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

In addition, previous research by Ahmad & Lestari (2021) found that the integration of application-based technology in English learning can improve students' comprehension and productive skills, especially when the application content is adapted to the school curriculum material. This reinforces the findings of this study that the relevance of application content to subject matter has an important role in the effectiveness of its use.

Thus, it can be concluded that the interconnection between the Lerna AI application and the subject matter in the classroom makes it easier for students to repeat, understand, and practice English. It is this relevance that makes the app not only an additional training medium, but also an instrument that supports formal learning while improving hands-on speaking skills.

2 **Increases Motivation and Reduces Boredom**

The results of the interviews showed that the use of the Lerna AI application was able to create a more enjoyable and non-monotonous learning atmosphere. Nanda Irawan said: *"I think it's more fun, because it's not just reading or writing, but being able to practice speaking directly in an interactive way."* (Interview, May 1, 2025). The same thing was conveyed by Irma Rahmawati: *"Yes, I think it's more fun. Because it's not boring like just memorizing, but you can immediately practice speaking."* Meanwhile, M. Thoriq added: *"I think it's more interesting, because it's like playing while learning. There are interactive conversations, so it's not as monotonous as just reading a book."* From this statement, it is clear that the application is able to provide a more varied learning atmosphere so as to reduce student boredom when practicing speaking English.

These findings are in line with the theory of learning motivation put forward by Deci & Ryan (1985) in *Self-Determination Theory*, which explains that students' intrinsic motivation increases when they find learning activities fun, interactive, and provide new experiences. Non-monotonous learning provides positive stimulation that encourages students to participate more actively. In this context, the Lerna AI application meets these needs by providing interactive conversational exercises, so that students' learning motivation in honing their speaking skills increases.

Previous research by Yunita & Ahmad (2020) also supports this finding, where the integration of technology-based applications in language learning has been shown to increase students' interest and motivation because it presents a different learning feel than traditional methods. Likewise, research by Hwang & Fu (2019) found that the use of mobile learning applications provides a more engaging learning experience and is able to reduce student boredom, especially in learning language skills.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Lerna AI application not only serves as a medium for speaking exercise, but also as a means that increases students' motivation to learn and reduces boredom. The fun and interactive learning atmosphere encourages students to be more active, consistent, and confident in practicing English speaking skills.

3 **Improved Speaking Skills**

Based on the results of the interviews, the informants agreed that the use of the Lerna AI application had a positive impact on their speaking skills. M. Thoriq stated: *"Yes, my skills have improved, especially in the speaking section. My pronunciation improved, my vocabulary improved, and I became more accustomed to composing"*

spontaneous sentences." (Interview, May 1, 2025). The same thing was conveyed by Nanda Irawan: *"Yes, I feel improving. Especially in the speaking part, because frequent practice makes me more accustomed to stringing sentences and pronouncing words correctly."* Meanwhile, Irma Rahmawati added: *"I feel that there is an improvement. Now I respond faster to questions in English and my vocabulary has also improved."* From this statement, it can be understood that the aspects that increase include pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency in speaking, and speed of response.

This finding is in line with the theory put forward by Brown (2004) in *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*, that speaking skills are a combination of vocabulary mastery, fluency, accuracy, and the courage to convey ideas orally. With repetitive exercises through the *app*, students can improve these aspects as they get used to responding spontaneously in the context of conversation.

Previous research also supports these results. For example, a study by Luaran et al. (2021) showed that the use of Artificial Intelligence-based applications in English learning can improve students' vocabulary mastery and speaking ability. In addition, research by Rahmawati & Putra (2020) found that speaking practice through mobile learning applications contributes significantly to improving speaking fluency and students' courage to answer questions in class.

Thus, it can be concluded that the *Learna AI* application is effective as a supporting medium for English learning, especially in improving speaking skills. The improvement felt by students includes vocabulary mastery, pronunciation improvements, fluency in speaking, and quick responses in conversation. This shows that apps play a role not only in the cognitive aspect, but also in students' practical skills in using English.

4 Development of Speaking and Listening at the Same Time

The results of the interviews show that the use of the *Learna AI* application not only improves speaking skills, but also supports the development of listening skills. Irma Rahmawati stated: *"The most felt is speaking and listening. Because I often practice conversations and automatically have to listen to the response from the app."* (Interview, May 2, 2025). A similar statement was conveyed by Nanda Irawan: *"It is most felt in speaking and listening. Because I have to listen to the app's response and at the same time answer in English."* Meanwhile, M. Thoriq added: *"It is most pronounced in the skills of speaking and listening. Because I practiced a lot of dialogue and had to understand the app's response."* From these three statements, it can be understood that the interactive conversation practice in the application requires students to play an active role, namely listening to questions/responses as well as giving spontaneous answers.

This finding is in line with the concept of *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) put forward by Richards (2006), where speaking (productive skills) and listening skills (receptive skills) should be developed in an integrated manner through real communication practices. When students practice interactive conversations, they not only produce language, but also understand the language input of the interlocutor (in this case an application), thus establishing a balance of receptive and productive skills.

These results are also supported by previous research. For example, a study by Azar & Nasiri (2014) found that technology-based conversational practice can improve speaking and listening skills because students are used to listening to authentic input and responding directly. Likewise, research by Hwang & Chang (2020) confirms that mobile learning applications with interactive features contribute greatly to improving oral communication skills comprehensively, not only speaking, but also listening.

Thus, it can be concluded that the use of the *Learna AI* application plays an important role in developing speaking and listening skills simultaneously. Through

interactive conversation simulations, students are trained to understand responses as well as give spontaneous answers, so that language learning becomes more natural, contextual, and effective in improving their communication skills.

5 Role of Conversation Simulation Features

The results of the interview show that the conversation simulation feature in the Lerna AI application has an important role in improving students' speaking fluency. M. Thoriq revealed: *"This application provides conversation simulation. So I can immediately practice speaking, get a response, and then correct if there is a mistake. It made me get used to it and it was smoother."* (Interview, May 1, 2025). The same thing was conveyed by Irma Rahmawati who said: *"With the conversation simulation, I became accustomed to saying words and composing sentences. It makes me smoother than I used to be."* Meanwhile, Nanda Irawan added: *"With simulated conversations, I can practice continuously. If I make a mistake, it can be repeated, so I learn faster and get used to speaking."* From this statement, it can be concluded that the conversation simulation feature provides opportunities for students to practice repeatedly, correct mistakes, and increase spontaneity of speaking.

This finding is in line with the view of Harmer (2007) in *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, which emphasizes that fluency can develop through repeated practice in situations that resemble real communication. The existence of a direct response from the application allows students to *self-correct* pronunciation errors and sentence structure, so that the learning process becomes more effective.

Previous research also supports these results. A study by Li & Hegelheimer (2013) shows that technology-based conversation simulations can improve *speaking fluency* because students are used to dynamic conversations. In addition, research by Syafitri & Hidayat (2021) found that *the conversation simulation* feature in mobile learning applications helps students improve pronunciation while building more natural speaking habits.

Thus, it can be concluded that the conversation simulation feature in the Lerna AI application has a significant role in supporting students' speaking skills. This feature allows students to practice intensively, obtain interactive responses, correct mistakes independently, and build fluent and confident speaking habits in English.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the speaking skills of EFL students at MA Nurul Huda Dasuk Sumenep still face quite serious obstacles, especially vocabulary limitations, nervousness, and lack of opportunities to practice in class. This has an impact on the low activity of students and the average score of speaking skills which is still below the minimum standard of completeness.

The application of the Lerna AI application as a learning medium has been proven to be able to increase student engagement, confidence, and speaking ability. Students become more courageous to express their opinions, be active in discussions, and be able to practice more effectively through interactive conversation simulations and instant feedback provided by AI.

These findings are in line with previous research on the role of AI in improving language skills, but make a new contribution by emphasizing its application in the madrasah environment. Thus, the use of AI, especially the Lerna AI application, can be a practical and relevant solution to support the improvement of EFL students' English speaking skills, as well as a pedagogical strategy that is adaptive to learning needs in the digital era.

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