

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The fast increase of globalization and digital revolution has increased the role of English as an international language in areas such as education, science, business, tourism, and worldwide communication (A. T. Napitupulu et al., 2025). Knowledge of English allows the students to have access to additional resources, to communicate on an international scale, and to open up their future career opportunities. English is considered an important part of secondary education in Indonesia and is taught as a foreign language at school. Speaking poses certain difficulties since using English correctly means having not only proper grammatical knowledge but also communication skills (Qasim, 2021).

The teaching of English includes four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among those, speaking is often considered the most challenging skill to develop. According to Mehta and Sharma (2023, p.78, as cited in M. F. Napitupulu & Dalimunte, 2025) state, "speaking is the most immediate and overt manifestation of language proficiency and is the major means of social interaction and the direct index of communicative competence." Speaking involves spontaneous language production, quick organizing of ideas, using proper grammar, selecting proper vocabulary, proper articulation of words, and reacting to the interlocutor immediately. The authors point out that all of those issues become even more complicated in an EFL environment due to the high level of language anxiety, communication barriers, and lack of authentic language practice (M. F. Napitupulu & Dalimunte, 2025).

At the senior high school level, speaking competence is an important factor that affects the level of confidence and communicative competence of the students (Areta et al., 2021). Speaking activities allow the students to share their thoughts, transmit information, and be more

actively involved in the process of interaction within the class (Akhter, 2021; Aziezah et al., 2025). Moreover, students who have good speaking competence skills have greater chances to engage in presentations, discussions, and other types of collaborative learning activities (Andriani et al., 2025). Besides, constant practice of speaking skills develops critical thinking and communicative competence, and increases students' self-confidence when communicating in English (Robah & Anggrisia, 2023; Purwati et al., 2023).

However, there is still quite a significant number of high school students who have difficulties in developing speaking skills. Lack of vocabulary limits them in expressing their thoughts. There are also students who understand the issue but cannot speak fluently because of the fear of making grammatical mistakes or mispronouncing the words (Octaberlina & Anggarini, 2024). Moreover, some students do not possess enough self-confidence and fear expressing themselves when in front of people. In many cases, teachers give very few chances for practicing speaking skills due to a lack of time, large group sizes, or a teacher-oriented approach to instruction (Abrar et al., 2020).

Motivation is one of the key determinants of the success of students in learning language. Motivation involves both internal and external variables that encourage learners to become active, practice, and persistently work towards achieving their goals (Sahombu, 2025). Highly motivated learners generally demonstrate enthusiasm, confidence, curiosity, and willingness to improve their knowledge of English. On the other hand, less motivated learners tend to avoid speaking activities, speak hesitantly, and view English as difficult or boring. As such, motivation should be improved in order to improve speaking skills.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the most significant inventions in the education field owing to fast-paced technological developments (Rofiidah et al., 2025). Artificial Intelligence (AI) involves computer systems that can carry out tasks

commonly associated with human intelligence, such as understanding language, generating responses (Kim, 2025), analyzing errors (Marquez & Liu, 2023), and providing personalized feedback (Masyhuda & Education, 2025). AI systems such as ChatGPT, Gemini, virtual speaking companions, and chatbots have been developed into some of the main tools for language learning. Using these AI systems, one can learn how to speak independently, simulate conversations, come up with conversation topics, get vocabulary suggestions, receive grammar corrections, and receive feedback instantly. As a result, learning opportunities can be accessed anytime, anywhere, without relying solely on classroom interaction.

A lot of previous studies show that AI contributes positively to motivation in language learning. According to Moybeka et al. (2023), AI-enabled learning environments boosted students' intrinsic motivation because they made learning fun and interesting thanks to interactive technology and personalized feedback. Furthermore, students got better self-efficacy because they were able to track their progress on their own. Kim (2025) observed that motivated learners who had better awareness of AI tools learned English more willingly because they saw AI tools as helpful and convenient means of learning English. In another study, found that AI-aided learning provided students with a more enjoyable learning experience, decreased stress, and facilitated their participation in learning activities (Lok, 2026).

Previous research studies clearly show that AI can be successfully applied to facilitate the development of speaking skills in learners. Tai and Chen (2024) showed that using AI chatbots, EFL learners can practice their conversations as many times as needed without being afraid of criticism (X. Wang & Wen, 2025). As a result, learners felt more confident and developed their fluency in speaking. Such conclusions were made by Wan and Moorhouse (2024). Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2024) discovered that the use of AI facilitated increased enjoyment and willingness to communicate while decreasing

speaking anxiety among participants. Consequently, these results mean that using AI tools can create safe and flexible environments for practicing speaking (X. Wang & Wen, 2025).

In regard to high school students, Sok et al. (2025) conducted the study entitled *Investigating High School Students' Attitudes Toward the Use of AI in Education: Evidence from Cambodia*. The authors examined 315 high school students from grades 10 to 12 and found that most of them had positive attitudes towards AI. The participants believed that AI was helpful in learning, increased efficiency, and made information more accessible. However, issues related to dependency and ethical use of AI were also identified. This study is relevant as it considers high school students who are already familiar with AI technology.

Several studies in Indonesia highlight AI's relevance in secondary education. Masyhuda & Education (2025), as researchers at SMA Negeri 6 Surakarta, found that students' language performance improved significantly when using AI-based chatbots that provided instant feedback during revision and editing activities. These findings show that AI tools can help senior high school students develop language skills through interactive assistance.

Building on previous studies, this study extends the existing research by examining high school students' perceptions and motivations for using AI tools to develop speaking skills. The findings also provide empirical evidence to support English teaching practices, technology integration in schools, and future studies on AI-assisted language learning.

Although many studies have shown the positive impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on language learning, several limitations remain in existing research. Most previous studies have concentrated on general education settings, university students, or adult learners. As a result, the specific characteristics of senior high school students have not been fully represented. They often require more structured guidance,

regular practice, and confidence-building support, especially in speaking classes where nervousness and hesitation are frequently experienced (Sok et al., 2025; Kim, 2025).

Furthermore, many earlier studies focused mainly on learning outcomes, technological performance, or general language achievement, while students' perceptions and motivation were not comprehensively explored. In fact, students' positive perceptions of AI tools can influence their willingness to adopt and use technology continuously. Likewise, motivation plays an essential role in determining how actively students practice and how consistently they engage in learning activities. If these two aspects are ignored, the use of AI in education may not produce optimal learning benefits (Moybeka et al., 2023; Yuan & Liu, 2025).

In addition, contextual evidence from Indonesian senior high schools remains limited, particularly from real classroom situations where students directly face speaking challenges (Rosyada & Taopan, 2025; M. F. Napitupulu & Dalimunte, 2025). Based on the researcher's previous teaching experience at Manbaul Huda Senior High School, especially in the eleventh grade, the topic of giving and asking opinions was taught with an emphasis on speaking practice. Although many students understood the material theoretically, some still struggled to speak English confidently. They often hesitated to speak, found it challenging to convey ideas, and worried about making mistakes in grammar or pronunciation during speaking activities, which is consistent with previous findings on speaking anxiety and oral participation among EFL learners (Qureshi et al., 2025; M. F. Napitupulu & Dalimunte, 2025). This condition indicates that students need more supportive, flexible, and interactive learning media to improve their speaking confidence and performance (Moybeka et al., 2023; Sahombu, 2025).

Given these limitations, this study offers several novelties. First, the study specifically focuses on senior high school students, particularly eleventh-grade students at Manbaul Huda Senior High

School, a population that has received limited attention in previous studies. Second, students' perceptions and motivation are investigated simultaneously as two important variables within one study.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate how high school students perceive the use of AI tools and how motivated they are to use such technology to improve their English-speaking skills. The existence of these research gaps shows that understanding students' perceptions and motivations toward AI tools is no longer optional but essential to ensure that technology integration becomes a practical solution for overcoming limitations in speaking practice and improving students' communicative competence in the digital era (Kim, 2025). Without adequate understanding, the pedagogical potential of AI tools may not be maximized in classroom practice (Alfaleh et al., 2025; Lok, 2026).

B. Problem Statement

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, speaking skills remain a major challenge for students, particularly at the senior high school level. Although English has been taught in Indonesian schools for many years, difficulties with oral English communication remain for many students. To speak effectively, ideas must be expressed spontaneously, vocabulary should be appropriate, grammar needs to be applied accurately, and words should be clearly pronounced. However, in classroom practice, anxiety is still felt by many students, confidence is often lacking, and hesitation to speak English frequently appears when opinions are requested during discussions.

This issue is also reflected in national English proficiency data. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2025, Indonesia remains in the low proficiency category, indicating that many learners still face challenges in mastering communicative English skills, particularly speaking. In addition, students' speaking difficulties in Indonesia have been observed in classroom settings and discovered in previous studies. It is limited by fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, low confidence, and insufficient opportunities for speaking

practice. As a consequence, students' speaking performance remains below expectations.

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has provided new opportunities in language learning. AI tools such as ChatGPT, AI chatbots, virtual speaking partners, and automated feedback systems can support students' independent speaking practice. Through these technologies, conversations can be simulated, ideas generated, vocabulary suggestions received, and pronunciation improved, and students can obtain immediate feedback. Therefore, AI tools have the potential to create more flexible, interactive, and student-centered learning environments.

Several previous studies have reported positive contributions of AI in English learning, particularly in Indonesia. Likewise, students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in language learning were improved by AI tools in some studies. However, university students, general EFL learners, and broader language-learning outcomes were mostly the focus of previous studies. Only limited attention has been given specifically to senior high school students as the research population.

Moreover, learning achievement or general motivation was emphasized in many previous studies, while students' perceptions as technology users were less frequently explored. In fact, students' perceptions are important because the acceptance and use of technology in learning are influenced by them. Regular use of AI tools may be encouraged by positive perceptions, whereas students' willingness to integrate technology into their learning process may be reduced by negative perceptions. At the same time, motivation is considered another essential factor, as motivated students usually demonstrate more active participation and more consistent speaking practice. Therefore, perceptions and motivation need to be examined together in order to understand the effectiveness of AI tools in speaking learning.

Based on these problems, this study examines high school students' perceptions and motivations for using AI tools to enhance English speaking skills. The research questions in this study are as follows:

1. What are high school students' perceptions of using AI to enhance English speaking skills?
2. What is the level of high school students' motivation toward using AI to enhance their English speaking skills?
3. How do high school students perceive the role of AI tools to support their English speaking skills?

C. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine high school students' perceptions and motivations using AI to enhance English speaking skills. Specifically, this study is intended to:

1. To identify high school students' perceptions of using AI to enhance English speaking skills.
2. To analyze the level of high school students' motivation toward using AI to enhance their English speaking skills.
3. To describe high school students' views regarding the role of AI tools to support English speaking skills.

D. Significance of the Study

The benefits of this study are classified into two parts: theoretical and practical.

1. Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to enrich the existing literature in English language education, particularly regarding the integration of AI technologies to enhance students' motivation.

2. Practical Significance

a) For Teachers

A useful reference for selecting and utilizing AI tools as media for teaching speaking skills is expected to be provided for teachers through this study. Additionally, students' perceptions and motivations toward technology use can be better understood,

and the development of more interactive and student-centered teaching strategies may be supported.

b) For Students

More flexible learning experiences are expected for students through the use of AI tools. Moreover, students' confidence in speaking English may be improved, and independent learning through technology-based practice may be encouraged.

c) For Schools

This study may serve as a consideration for schools in integrating AI technology into English learning programs. Therefore, efforts to improve learning quality and students' digital literacy in accordance with current technological developments may be supported.

d) For Future Researchers

This study may serve as a reference for further research on language learning. Besides that, opportunities to explore other language skills, such as listening, reading, or writing, may be opened, and a basis for developing more specific AI-based learning models according to the senior high school context may be provided.