

Students' Perceptions of the Benefits of Using *Character.AI* for Speaking Practice

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ABSTRACT

This study explores students' perceptions of the role of *Character.AI* in developing speaking skills and supporting adaptive communicative practice. Most existing studies on AI in language learning primarily focus on tools that rely on structured or predefined prompts, which tend to be monotonous and less effective in fostering adaptive speaking development. However, limited attention has been given to more interactive, persona-driven AI platforms that can simulate real-life communication. To address this gap, this study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach involving five (5) eighth-semester students of the English Education Study Program who had experience using *Character.AI* for speaking practice. Data were collected through triangulation methods, including questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that *Character.AI* contributes to the development of speaking skills, including improvements in fluency, confidence, motivation, vocabulary, willingness to speak, as well as a reduction in speaking anxiety. It also facilitates adaptive communicative practice by promoting adaptability, flexibility and accessibility in speaking activities. However, some limitations were identified, particularly in generating occasionally unnatural responses, indicating that it cannot fully replace authentic human interaction. Therefore, *Character.AI* is best utilized as a supplementary tool to support students in preparing for real-life communication.

Keywords: *Character.AI*, Speaking skills, Artificial Intelligence

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English plays a crucial role as an international language. It enables individuals to communicate with people across different cultures and countries. Due to its global importance, learning English is particularly essential for EFL learners, who have limited exposure to the language outside the classroom and therefore depend on formal education to develop their English proficiency. According to Fatimah et al. (2025), learners who receive direct exposure to English, including engaging in listening and speaking activities as well as using the language actively, demonstrate the greatest improvement in their English proficiency. Therefore, it is important to be exposed to English in order to strengthen language skills among EFL learners.

There are four primary skills in English: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Compared to the other fundamental skills, speaking is especially vital for language learning and the development of communicative competence (Napitupulu & Dalimunte, 2025). Supporting this, a study by Yuniarti et al. (2025) found that 85.9% of university learners expressed a strong intention to improve their speaking ability, emphasizing that speaking is essential for global communication. Furthermore, Albiansyah & Minkhatunnakhriyah (2021) highlighted that students were expected to use English in daily communication, particularly

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to support their future career opportunities. In this regard, students believe that they should be able to use English in their everyday conversations, which requires consistent exposure to English within their social and learning environments.

Despite its benefits for communicative competence, speaking remains challenging for many EFL learners. Research by Nurliana et al. (2022) stated that many learners encounter challenges when speaking English in front of the class, largely due to their anxiety about making mistakes, limited motivation to express themselves, feelings of shyness, and a greater sense of comfort when using their first language. It is aligned with research conducted by Meidyana et al. (2024) that EFL learners frequently encounter obstacles in improving their speaking abilities, such as insufficient opportunities to practice, challenges in pronunciation, and anxiety when speaking. In addition, for many non-native learners, communicating in English becomes particularly difficult in front of larger audiences due to heightened anxiety and feelings of inadequacy that emerge in public speaking contexts (Khafidhoh et al., 2023).

In other hand, several learners reported experiencing a lack of confidence when speaking with peers, teachers, or lecturers who have a higher level of English proficiency, as they fear making mistakes and being negatively evaluated. These concerns are further intensified by feelings of nervousness, trembling, and shyness, which collectively contribute to students' anxiety when speaking English (Khafidhoh et al., 2023). Furthermore, many learners perceived school or university as their primary context for practicing English, since they rarely have speaking partners outside the classroom. It is further supported by Sartika et al. (2022), Indonesian EFL learners often struggle to find speaking partners because English is not commonly used in their social environment. This limited practice beyond academic environments restricts their exposure to authentic communication and consequently hinders the development of their speaking skills.

In short, there are several factors contribute to students' low speaking proficiency, including teacher-centered instructional approaches, limited in-class practice time, a lack of interactive media to support language use, and low self-confidence resulting from minimal exposure to English in real-life contexts (Gultom et al., 2026). These conditions highlight the need for innovative English language teaching methods that offer more opportunities for meaningful practice, provide immediate feedback, and create a low-pressure learning environment. In addition, factors such as adequate preparation, increased self-confidence, supportive peer interaction, and consistent practice play an important role in reducing learners' speaking anxiety (Khafidhoh et al., 2023).

Since university students often face constraints in developing speaking competence due to limited time for communicative practice, heightened speaking anxiety, and inadequate access to adaptive learning resources, they are required to explore alternative solutions that can be adaptively implemented based on their needs (Ramasari & Ardayati, 2025). This implies that learners need to identify adaptive solutions that align with technological advancements to support the development of their speaking competence. AI technologies, including machine learning, natural language processing, and intelligent tutoring systems, facilitate more personalized and adaptive learning experiences for learners (Fauziah et al., 2025). In this context, adaptive refers to learning tools that can be accessed anytime and anywhere, provide interactive engagement, minimize negative judgment, and facilitate authentic daily communication. These advantages are evident in the advancement of AI-based technologies, which offer learners opportunities to practice speaking through realistic and dynamic communicative interactions.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has become increasingly important, particularly in the context of English language teaching. AI technologies enable more effective and efficient learning processes by supporting adaptive learning systems, providing immediate feedback, and facilitating automated language assessment (Asrifan et al., 2025). Another study by Sungkur & Shibdeen (2025) stated that AI is highly suitable for educational settings due to its ability to process large volumes of data and deliver instant feedback to learners. Moreover, AI integration in language learning is often manifested through adaptive learning platforms, which transform the learning process by offering

personalized learning experiences tailored to individual needs. These platforms have attracted considerable attention from academic stakeholders, as reflected in research examining their applications, benefits, and challenges (Akinsemolu & Onyeaka, 2025). Furthermore, the role of AI in education has become more prominent in the post-pandemic era. Hockly (2023) highlights that AI-powered educational technologies have gained widespread acceptance in English Language Teaching (ELT), indicating a shift toward more technology-enhanced learning environments. In higher education, AI contributes to improved learning outcomes by enabling educators to deliver personalized instruction and align teaching strategies with students' diverse needs, learning styles, and preferences (AlTwijri & Alghizzi, 2024). Additionally, in the context of language learning, AI offers various advantages, including personalized feedback, flexible learning pathways, intelligent tutoring systems, and natural language processing tools (Alshumaimeri & Alshememry, 2024). Taken together, these capabilities demonstrate that the integration of AI is not only beneficial, but also essential in modern education, as it enhances learning effectiveness, supports individualized instruction, and addresses the evolving demands of 21st-century learners.

In relation to speaking skills, AI-based conversational applications provide learners with opportunities to practice spoken English through realistic and contextualized interactions, offering a promising solution to address the speaking difficulties faced by EFL learners. Previous studies have consistently highlighted the benefits of AI integration in language learning. For instance, Nguyen et al. (2025) reported that AI-based tools significantly enhance speaking fluency among EFL students. Similarly, Ridwan (2025) found that AI fosters learners' confidence by reducing social pressure, providing real-time feedback, and supporting flexible, self-directed learning opportunities. In addition, AI-powered applications offer personalized assistance and interactive practice environments tailored to learners' needs (Fauziah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, repeated practice and instant feedback enabled by AI have been shown to improve vocabulary retention and support learners' understanding of vocabulary in contextualized sentence use (Yuniar et al., 2026). Positive learner perceptions have also been documented, with students demonstrating improved speaking skills, enhanced learning experiences, and a strong willingness to continue using AI platforms for speaking practice (Zou et al., 2025). Moreover, generative AI has been identified as a valuable tool for increasing learners' motivation by creating more engaging and enjoyable learning experiences (Indrayani et al., 2022). Therefore, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is crucial in supporting learners' speaking development.

Several AI tools offer new experiences and diverse learning styles to help learners practice their speaking skills. A study by Maysuroh et al. (2025) revealed that Chat GPT (AI chatbots) was perceived positively by most students, particularly due to its accessibility, privacy, and non-judgmental interaction, which supported their speaking practice. Moreover, the chatbot enhanced students' motivation, confidence, and engagement through its continuous availability and supportive feedback. In addition, Gultom et al. (2026) highlighted that AI-based tools such as Chat GPT, ELSA Speak, and Talkpal can enhance students' speaking skills, including fluency, accuracy, confidence, and pronunciation. Students also reported that AI-assisted learning serves as an effective medium for independent speaking practice.

However, several AI-based language learning applications, such as ELSA Speak, ChatGPT, and TalkPal, present certain limitations. Access to comprehensive learning materials and advanced features is often restricted behind subscription-based models, requiring users to pay for full functionality. In addition, these platforms may rely heavily on structured prompts and predefined learning pathways, which can result in interactions that feel repetitive and less engaging. Furthermore, the feedback provided may lack variability, partly due to the limited range of interactive personas or conversational styles available, which can reduce the richness of learners' speaking practice experiences. These limitations may also contribute to a lack of natural and empathetic interaction, as well as a limited ability to understand users'

emotions and intentions, resulting in more rigid learning experiences (Fakhri & Indriasari, 2025).

To address these limitations, it is necessary to find AI applications that are both effective and accessible as partners for practicing speaking. Unlike other AI applications, Character.AI presents a potential solution to support students in developing their speaking skills. Napitupulu & Dalimunte (2025) stated that Character.AI offers three major benefits: improved speaking fluency, increased learner confidence, and greater flexibility in practice. These advantages are closely related to Character.AI's ability to generate real-time, human-like interactions, which support more adaptive speaking practice. This claim is further supported by Ulfa (2025), who found that AI-based real-time feedback enhances learning efficiency and accessibility while enabling more structured and effective English speaking practice. Therefore, the integration of AI applications such as Character.AI demonstrates strong potential as a medium for providing extensive language exposure to EFL learners, as increased exposure to the target language is closely associated with enhanced speaking proficiency and comprehension (Jahrani & Listia, 2023).

However, despite the growing use of AI-based applications in language learning, limited research has specifically examined the use of Character.AI in supporting speaking development and facilitating adaptive communicative practice from students' perspectives. Most existing studies tend to focus on AI tools that rely on structured or predefined prompts, which emphasize controlled responses rather than natural, non-scripted interaction. As a result, the potential of Character.AI as a persona-driven platform for simulating authentic communication remains underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring EFL students' perceptions of using Character.AI in developing their speaking skills and facilitating adaptive communicative practice.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore EFL students' lived experiences in using Character.AI for speaking practice. As stated by Maulana & Budiono (2024), the phenomenological approach is used to explore and interpret participants' lived experiences, focusing on how they perceive and make meaning of the phenomenon being studied. Accordingly, this study focused on students' reflections, feedback, emotional responses, levels of comfort, and challenges encountered during their use of Character.AI for speaking practice.

This study involved five (5) EFL students from Palangka Raya University who were in their eighth semester. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. The criteria included: (1) students who had learned English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as part of their academic program, and (2) students who had prior experience using Character.AI for developing their speaking skills and were willing to participate in in-depth interviews. The study was conducted over a four-week period, from March to April.

The data were collected through interviews and questionnaires, and validated through triangulation. The questionnaire was close-ended and was administered as a supporting instrument to capture students' general perceptions toward the use of Character.AI. It consisted of Likert-scale items ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* and was used to provide an overview of two main dimensions: developing speaking skills (including fluency, vocabulary, motivation, anxiety reduction, confidence, and willingness to speak) and facilitating adaptive communicative practice (including adaptability, flexibility & accessibility in practice). The questionnaire data served as complementary data to support the qualitative findings from the interviews. Moreover, the primary data for this study were obtained through semi-structured interviews with participants who had experience using Character.AI for speaking practice. The interviews aimed to explore students' lived experiences and focused on their reflections, feedback, emotional responses, levels of comfort, and challenges encountered during their use of Character.AI. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a list

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of guiding questions to help them prepare their responses. As the interviews employed a semi-structured format, additional follow-up questions were asked during the interview process to explore participants' responses in greater depth and to obtain more comprehensive insights. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, depending on the depth of the information obtained, and was recorded with participants' consent before being transcribed for analysis.

All interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview was conducted in Indonesian to ensure the credibility of the data and information, and was subsequently translated into English as the final result. The interview transcripts were treated as the main qualitative data source and analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), involving transcription, initial coding, theme generation, and refinement. The analysis process began with familiarization through repeated reading of the transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences in using Character.AI for speaking practice. This was followed by initial coding to identify meaningful statements related to students' reflections, emotional responses, comfort levels, and challenges during AI-based speaking interactions. The codes were then organized into potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure consistency and relevance to the research focus. Finally, the themes were interpreted to represent students lived experiences in using Character.AI for speaking practice. The use of interview transcripts enabled the researcher to capture participants' authentic expressions and meanings, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the procedures involved. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and participants were given the right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before administering the questionnaire and conducting the interviews. To protect participants' privacy, all personal information was kept confidential, and anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms or codes in the data presentation. The data collected from questionnaires and interviews were used solely for research purposes and stored securely. Additionally, participants were assured that their responses would not affect their academic evaluation or standing. These ethical procedures were implemented to ensure that the study was conducted responsibly and respectfully.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The data were analysed using a triangulation technique, incorporating both questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire served as supporting data, while the interviews provided the primary data.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to examine students' general perceptions across two dimensions: (1) speaking skill development (fluency, confidence, motivation, vocabulary, willingness to speak, and anxiety reduction), and (2) adaptive communicative practice (adaptability, flexibility & accessibility). The questions for the first dimension are item number 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9; while for second dimension are item number 2 and 6.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Each Category Based on Students' Questionnaire Responses

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I experience limitations when practicing speaking directly with friends, teachers, or lecturers	0%	60%	40%	0%
2	I feel that Character.AI is an adaptive medium that can help me practice my speaking skills in a realistic way.	60%	20%	20%	0%

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3	I am able to construct simple conversational sentences better after using Character.AI as a speaking practice tool.	0%	100%	0%	0%
4	I believe my English vocabulary has improved through regular interactions with Character.AI.	0%	80%	20%	0%
5	I feel that the voice and speaking style of characters in Character.AI closely resemble the original characters, which increases my motivation to practice speaking.	40%	60%	0%	0%
6	I can practice speaking using Character.AI anytime and anywhere without having to find a direct speaking partner.	20%	60%	20%	0%
7	I feel more confident speaking English in real-life situations after using Character.AI as a practice partner.	0%	80%	20%	0%
8	I feel that practicing speaking using Character.AI helps reduce my anxiety when starting conversations in English.	20%	80%	0%	0%
9	I believe I am more prepared to speak English in daily life after practicing with Character.AI.	20%	40%	40%	0%

Table 1 shows that the majority of students responded positively to the use of Character.AI for speaking practice. Most responses were concentrated in the *Agree* categories, indicating favourable perceptions of the application. The findings suggest that Character.AI successfully develop speaking skills (increase fluency 100%, vocabulary 80%, motivation & engagement 100%, confidence 80%, willingness to speak 60%, and anxiety reduction 100%) and facilitating adaptive communicative practice (adaptability 80%, and flexibility & accessibility 80%). However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the small number of participants (N = 5).

Interview

The interview data serve as the primary source of this study. Semi-structured interviews were employed to gain in-depth insights into students lived experiences in using Character.AI, focusing on two primary aspects: the perceived benefits of using Character.AI and the challenges encountered by students during the practice.

The Benefits of Using Character.AI for Speaking Practice

Adaptability to Students' Needs

Most informants mentioned that they found it difficult to find partners to practice speaking English, which resulted in limited exposure to the target language. Informant 4 shared his experience, stating that he still had limited time to practice outside the classroom:

"In the university environment, particularly as English major students, we are required to use English both inside the classroom and during the learning process, which allows us to practice with our classmates. However, outside this environment, it becomes more difficult to find people to practice speaking English with."

However, the students discovered an application called Character.AI, which serves as an adaptive solution for their speaking development. Informant 1 stated that Character.AI is better than other AI applications for practicing speaking English because it offers a wide variety of characters:

"In my opinion, Character.AI is highly adaptive, as it allows users to interact with a wide variety of characters, which may exceed the options available in ChatGPT or Gemini that sometimes feel relatively limited."

Similarly, Informant 3 also stated that practicing through Character.AI was fun and enjoyable:

"I found it to be very engaging. It offers a wide variety of AI characters, including cartoons and anime, which makes the experience enjoyable. I also felt more confident because I was interacting with my favourite characters. This sense of familiarity made me feel closer to them, making the process of learning English through Character.AI more fun and engaging."

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The data provided by the students revealed that Character.AI serves as an adaptive solution through its wide variety of characters and the sense of comfort it offers during practice. This, in turn, creates a positive learning environment that supports the development of their speaking competence and enhances their awareness of the importance of English as an international language. Furthermore, it enables students to practice independently without requiring direct interaction with peers or other individuals.

Fluency Improvement

Most informants reported that Character.AI provides a significant impact on their speaking competence. The benefits include improved fluency when communicating with others after consistent practice. Informant 5 mentioned that frequent exposure through the use of Character.AI helped them become more fluent in speaking:

"After several practice sessions using Character.AI, I found it easier to construct simple sentences. Initially, I made many mistakes; however, over time, I became more fluent due to frequent exposure to examples of AI-generated responses."

Moreover, Informant 2 highlighted that it became easier for him to construct sentences and develop his vocabulary due to frequent exposure to conversations and flexible practice with Character.AI:

"Constructing sentences became easier for me because I could engage in frequent conversations with Character.AI. This helped me a lot, particularly in terms of vocabulary development. Character.AI provides responses that can be adjusted to the type of sentences we want to use."

Based on the informants' responses, it can be concluded that Character.AI effectively supported the improvement of their speaking fluency. This improvement can be attributed to several key factors, including vocabulary acquisition, improved sentence construction, flexible practice, increased language exposure, and a greater willingness to speak.

Vocabulary Enhancement

The majority of informants reported notable improvements in their vocabulary through consistent practice with Character.AI. They indicated that the application provides interactive conversations featuring a wide range of vocabulary, which can be effectively acquired through regular use. Furthermore, the application provides a chat history feature that contains the entire conversation from each practice session in written form, enabling students to review and learn new vocabulary from their interactions.

Informant 5 highlighted that he acquired new vocabulary for daily communication through consistent practice with Character.AI:

"I experienced an improvement in my vocabulary, particularly in everyday expressions. When I did not know certain words, I could observe how the AI responded, which helped me learn new vocabulary in context."

Informant 1 explained that he learned new vocabulary by reviewing the conversation history, then noting down unfamiliar words and attempting to understand their meanings:

"I have checked the conversation history, and reviewed the words I did not understand from the AI. I then noted down the vocabulary from Character.AI and tried to research or find out their meanings."

From Informant 1's response, it can be observed that Character.AI offers a valuable feature in the form of chat history for each conversation. This feature enables users to revisit previous interactions, making it easier to recall prior learning and identify newly acquired vocabulary, which contributes to the development of their fluency and confidence in speaking.

Motivation and Engagement

Most of the informants reported that Character.AI helped increase their motivation and engagement in practicing speaking due to its realistic character voices. They perceived the interaction as similar to communicating with real humans or their favourite characters, which created a sense of comfort and encouraged them to practice more consistently. As expressed by Informant 1, the characters felt very similar to his favourite characters, making the experience more engaging and immersive:

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"I feel very comfortable because Character.AI presents characters that closely resemble their original versions, making the interaction feel like engaging in a real-time conversation with them."

However, they still found that some characters occasionally spoke in a way that resembled artificial intelligence (AI). This statement is further supported by the responses of Informants 1, 2, and 5, who experienced similar situations. They reported that certain characters seemed artificial during interactions, while others were sufficiently realistic and closely resembled human communication. Informant 1 said:

"I think it quite resembles the character's voice in the application; however, sometimes in Character.AI the voice sounds somewhat flat, and it is still possible to distinguish between the AI-generated voice and the original character's voice."

In relation to the statement, Informant 4 suggested that the perception of characters sounding like AI is influenced by the type of characters chosen:

"Honestly, I think it depends on the character selected in the application. Since the app provides various character options, some voices sound good and feel quite real, while others still sound like pure AI. However, overall, the pronunciation is fairly clear."

Based on the informants' responses, most of them felt more motivated and comfortable when practicing speaking with Character.AI. The characters provided in the application were perceived as closely resembling real human voices, creating the impression of engaging in real-time conversations with their favorite characters. However, several informants reported that some of the characters they selected occasionally sounded artificial and unnatural. As a result, selecting characters that closely match their original voices becomes important. This is because the Character.AI application is *character-dependent*, meaning that the quality, realism, and naturalness of interaction vary depending on the specific character chosen by the user.

Flexibility and Accessibility

All of the informants agreed that they felt comfortable practicing speaking with Character.AI due to its flexibility and accessibility. They pointed out that the application is easy to use as long as there is an internet connection, allowing them to practice anytime and anywhere without having to wait for friends or speaking partners. Another important aspect is that they do not feel afraid of making mistakes, as Character.AI can provide examples to support their learning. As stated by Informant 5, he mentioned that:

"I feel it is very easy and comfortable to use. I can practice anytime and anywhere without pressure. I do not need to be afraid of making mistakes because the AI can help by providing examples."

Furthermore, Informant 2 emphasized that the comfort and enjoyment experienced in practicing through Character.AI are influenced by the availability of a wide range of characters in the application, allowing users to select preferred speaking partners:

"I like this application because it offers a variety of characters that I am interested in, such as anime and my favorite movie characters. As a result, learning through the Character.AI application becomes very enjoyable for me."

Based on the responses, it can be concluded that Character.AI effectively enhances students' comfort in speaking practice due to its flexibility and accessibility. The informants highlighted that the application enables them to practice anytime and anywhere without relying on peers or speaking partners. The availability of diverse characters also contributes to a more engaging and enjoyable learning experiences.

Confidence and Anxiety Reduction

Most of the informants reported that Character.AI helped them build their confidence through its various benefits during practice. They perceived that practicing with Character.AI had a positive impact, including helped them express their intended ideas more effectively, which subsequently enhanced their confidence to engage in real-time communication with others. Informant 1 mentioned:

"I experienced clear improvement in vocabulary, was better able to express my ideas in conversations, and became more confident when speaking with native speakers."

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Additionally, Informant 3 also shared similar experience, stating that she initially felt shy when speaking English with others. However, after discovering Character.AI, she became more confident and willing to communicate with various characters available in the application. She said:

"I personally experienced a degree of shyness when speaking English in direct interactions. However, after engaging with this application, I became more confident. The system appears to understand my intended meaning despite grammatical inaccuracies and provides stimulation to continue speaking."

Similarly, informant 1 added:

"Character.AI is very helpful in reducing anxiety when speaking in English. I personally tend to feel anxious when communicating directly with others in English; however, since using Character.AI, I have felt more relaxed because there is no pressure or judgment from others. As a result, I have become more willing to try expressing various sentences in English."

The statements from the informants suggest that building confidence is essential, as it plays a crucial role in influencing students' willingness to communicate. When students possess higher levels of confidence, they tend to experience reduced anxiety and fear of making mistakes, which in turn increases their willingness to engage in speaking activities. Moreover, students agree that practicing speaking through Character.AI is highly recommended as an initial step to reduce anxiety and increase confidence before engaging in communication with others. The application does not provide negative judgment; instead, it offers positive feedback and a comfortable environment during practice. Therefore, for individuals who still experience anxiety when initiating conversations, it is advisable to practice first with AI applications, such as Character.AI.

Willingness to Speak

Most of the informants reported that they felt more prepared to communicate with real people after consistently practicing speaking with Character.AI. As stated by Informant 2:

"I feel more prepared and more willing to speak English with others after regularly practicing with Character.AI. This is because the characters facilitate daily practice, and the application is free and easy to use, making it highly accessible."

This finding indicates that Character.AI has strong potential as a speaking partner, as it provides continuous exposure to English. As a result, students are not solely reliant on practicing speaking only in university settings. However, Informants 1, 2, 4, and 5 also acknowledged that despite this increased readiness, there are still aspects that require further improvement. These factors are related to the need for consistent practice in order to build familiarity. Although they may feel nervous when first attempting to speak, this can be gradually overcome through regular interaction with the characters available in Character.AI. As reported by Informant 5:

"Although my ability is not yet perfect, I have developed the courage and gained experience in speaking practice."

In short, students believe that consistent practice plays an important role in improving their speaking skills. Character.AI supports this consistency by providing immediate and supportive feedback during practice. As a result, students can continuously learn from their mistakes, build confidence, and gradually develop their speaking ability.

Challenges Encounter during Practice with Character.AI

Most of the informants reported that they encountered several challenges while practicing speaking with Character.AI. These challenges are related to internet connection issues, unnatural AI responses, excessive advertisements (ads), and unsupported devices. Despite these obstacles, the informants were still able to continue their practice and gain benefits from using the application.

Informant 2 shared his experiences related to the challenges he faced during practice:

"The application does not run well on my phone because my device does not support it. It is an old device with very limited storage, so I tried using the application on my laptop instead. Sometimes the AI's responses are not always in line with what I mean"

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or what I expect. Occasionally, the answers can be inaccurate, depending on the type of AI character used."

Based on the responses, it showed that Character.AI requires capable devices and appropriate character selection to achieve more optimal use. A capable device is important because not all devices or phones can install the application, so some users may need to access it through a laptop. In addition, users should be selective in choosing certain characters to obtain more accurate feedback and more natural conversations. Lastly, Informant 1 also added that having a stable internet connection is important to maximize the effectiveness of the application: *"We need to have a stable internet connection. If the connection is unstable, the application will not function optimally."*

Additionally, Informant 4 mentioned that Character.AI contains a considerable number of advertisements that appear consistently during use:

"During the use of the application, one challenge I noticed is that there are quite frequent advertisements. They appear fairly consistently. However, they can actually be removed, but it requires payment."

Even though advertisements appeared consistently, the informants reported that they did not significantly interfere with their ability to continue practicing. This suggests that the presence of ads, while noticeable, did not become a major barrier to engagement. Instead, the informants remained focused on the learning process and continued to use the application to support their speaking development.

Discussions

This study is consistent with previous research which suggests that AI facilitates adaptive learning, provides immediate feedback, and supports automated language assessment (Asrifan et al., 2025). The results of this study reveal that students experienced improvements across two dimensions: (1) speaking development, including fluency, vocabulary, motivation, engagement, confidence, willingness to speak, and reduced anxiety; and (2) adaptive communicative practice, particularly in terms of adaptability, flexibility, and accessibility.

However, a deeper analysis of the data from both the questionnaire and interviews revealed several inconsistencies in students' responses. For instance, questionnaire data indicated that some students disagreed with the statement that they did not have partners to practice speaking English in their daily lives. In contrast, during the interviews, these students reported that they actually did not have any speaking partners. These discrepancies suggest that questionnaire responses may not always fully reflect students' actual experiences. Therefore, in-depth interviews play a crucial role in providing more contextualized and accurate insights into students' real conditions and learning experiences.

All students highlighted that Character.AI serves as an adaptive solution due to its availability of a wide range of characters that can be selected based on their needs. This feature allows learners to engage in more personalized and meaningful speaking practice. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, as Ulfa (2025) demonstrated that AI-based real-time feedback enhances learning efficiency and accessibility, while enabling more structured and effective English-speaking practice. In addition, AI-powered applications provide personalized assistance, real-time feedback, and interactive practice environments designed to meet learners' needs (Fauziah et al., 2025).

The significant improvement in students' fluency, confidence, and flexibility in practice observed in this study is in line with the findings of Napitupulu & Dalimunte (2025), who identified three major benefits of using Character.AI: improved speaking fluency, increased learner confidence, and greater flexibility in practice. Prior to using the application, students reported several challenges in practicing speaking, particularly in finding speaking partners, which affected their ability to construct sentences and speak confidently. They also experienced limitations related to time constraints and limited exposure to the target language. However, after engaging in consistent practice with Character.AI, students found it easier to construct simple sentences and became more fluent due to frequent exposure to AI-generated

responses. Consistent with this findings, Nguyen et al. (2025) found that the integration of AI-based tools significantly enhances speaking fluency among EFL students. Additionally, the use of AI enabled students to express their intended ideas more effectively, which in turn enhanced their confidence. Students also perceived the application as flexible, as it can be used anytime and anywhere. These findings aligns with Ridwan (2025), who suggested that the use of AI fosters learners' confidence by reducing social pressure, providing real-time feedback, and facilitating flexible, self-directed learning opportunities.

In addition, most informants reported significant improvements in their vocabulary as a result of consistent practice with Character.AI. This improvement can be attributed to the application's interactive conversational features, which expose learners to a wide range of vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, the availability of a "History" feature, which stores complete records of each practice session in written form, enables students to review their interactions and reinforce newly acquired vocabulary. These findings demonstrate the relevance of Yuniar et al. (2026), highlighting the role of AI-based applications in facilitating vocabulary retention through repeated practice and immediate feedback, as well as promoting deeper contextual understanding.

The availability of a wide range of characters in Character.AI contributes to increased student motivation and engagement, as it enables learners to interact with human-like or familiar voices, including their favourite characters. Most students in this study reported that the application created a sense of comfort and encouraged them to engage in more consistent speaking practice. The findings suggested that generative AI functions as a valuable tool in enhancing EFL learners' motivation by creating a more engaging, enjoyable, and rewarding learning experience (Indrayani et al. 2022).

Character.AI contributed to reducing students' anxiety through its supportive and comfortable learning environment. In this study, students reported feelings of shyness and nervousness when attempting to speak in real-life communication. However, after consistent practice with Character.AI, they found the application helpful and engaging, which gradually reduced their anxiety levels. Students further reported that the application provided a positive and supportive environment for speaking development, serving as a preliminary stage before engaging in real interactions with others. This environment allowed learners to practice without fear of judgment, thereby increasing their confidence and willingness to communicate. The findings of this study reinforce the results reported by Maysuroh et al. (2025), underscoring the role of AI chatbots as accessible, private, and non-judgmental tools that facilitate effective speaking practice.

Character.AI demonstrates strong potential as a speaking partner, as it provides continuous exposure to the English language. Consequently, students are not solely dependent on practicing speaking within university settings. In this study, students reported feeling more prepared and confident to communicate in real-life situations after engaging in consistent practice with the application. This finding is consistent with Zou et al. (2025), who reported that learners demonstrated positive attitudes toward the use of AI platforms for speaking practice, as reflected in their improved speaking skills, enhanced learning experiences, and increased willingness to engage in future communication.

However, in this study, the integration of Character.AI as a speaking partner highlight both its advantages and disadvantages. Students appreciated AI-assisted learning, which provides flexibility in practice, a supportive learning environment, and accessible opportunities for repeated speaking practice. Despite these benefits, the findings indicate that students also encountered several challenges, particularly related to unnatural AI-generated responses. This issue arises because not all characters are designed to accurately reflect authentic human communication. In addition, some participants reported difficulties related to unstable internet connections, excessive advertisements, and limited device compatibility. These findings suggest that, although AI demonstrates strong potential as a speaking partner, it cannot fully replace human interaction, which remains more natural, dynamic, and contextually responsive. It is in line with Devikar et al. (2025), suggested that AI tools remain limited in replicating the essential human interactions required for communicative

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competence, as language learning extends beyond technical skills to encompass emotional, cultural, and social dimensions that current AI systems cannot fully address. Therefore, it is important to position AI chatbots as supplementary tools rather than replacements for authentic communication with native or fluent speakers.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it involved only five participants from the same university, which limits the applicability of the findings to a broader population and may not adequately represent EFL learners in general. Second, the study focused solely on one language skill, namely speaking, without exploring other fundamental language skills such as writing, listening, and reading. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended that future research involve a larger and more diverse sample to improve the generalizability of the findings. In addition, further studies should explore the use of AI in developing other language skills, such as writing, listening, and reading, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of AI in language learning.

Overall, this study provides compelling evidence that Character.AI serves as a valuable speaking tool in facilitating various benefits for students, including improvements in fluency, vocabulary, confidence, motivation, comfort and flexibility in practice, reduced anxiety, and increased willingness to speak. However, the findings also highlight the limitations of AI, particularly in generating unnatural responses, which indicate that it cannot fully replace authentic human communication.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the use of Character.AI as a speaking partner offers significant benefits for EFL learners, particularly in developing speaking skills and facilitating adaptive communicative practice. The findings indicate that students showed improvements in fluency, vocabulary, motivation, engagement, confidence, willingness to speak, and reduced anxiety. Furthermore, Character.AI was perceived as adaptable, flexible, and accessible in fulfilling students' learning needs. However, despite these advantages, this study also highlights several limitations of AI-assisted learning, including the occurrence of unnatural responses, technical issues such as unstable internet connections, excessive advertisements, and limited device compatibility. More importantly, AI tools remain limited in replicating the emotional, social, and contextual dimensions of authentic human interaction. Therefore, AI applications such as Character.AI should be positioned as supplementary tools rather than replacements for real human communication, as a balanced integration of AI and human interaction is essential for achieving more comprehensive and effective language learning outcomes. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that educators should strategically integrate AI-based applications like Character.AI into language learning activities to support students' speaking practice beyond the classroom. Teachers can utilize such tools to create low-anxiety learning environments, promote autonomous learning, and provide additional opportunities for interactive practice. However, it is crucial for educators to guide students in using AI critically and effectively, while still maintaining meaningful human interaction in the learning process. For future research, further studies are recommended to examine the long-term effects of AI-assisted speaking practice on learners' communicative competence by involving a larger number of participants and conducting research over a longer period of time to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Such extended and large-scale investigations would provide deeper insights into the effectiveness, consistency, and sustainability of AI use in language learning. Additionally, future researchers may explore the integration of Character.AI with various instructional approaches and across different proficiency levels, while also addressing existing limitations such as the naturalness of AI responses and technical constraints to further optimize its pedagogical potential.

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