

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The four main English skills are writing, reading, listening, and speaking. Specifically, English speaking poses a significant challenge for many students. Although some are proficient in writing, they struggle with verbal communication, which can lower their confidence (Li et al., 2025). Lack of speaking practice often leads to anxiety and feelings of unpreparedness when using English in real-life situations. Therefore, effective learning methods should offer opportunities for independent speaking practice to help students build confidence both in the classroom and beyond (Hermaniar & Azkiya, 2021).

Many schools in Indonesia still rely on traditional English teaching methods that emphasize theory, grammar, and vocabulary, while giving little attention to speaking practice, leading to a gap in students' speaking abilities (Pratiwi et al., 2024). As a result, students often lack confidence in speaking due to limited exposure to interactive activities. Although they may have a strong understanding of grammar and vocabulary, their ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations remains weak, indicating the need for more practical, speaking-focused instruction (Li et al., 2025).

Ramadhan (2023) emphasizes that the integration of technology, including language learning applications and online platforms, can be a valuable means to boost student engagement in speaking practice. The implementation of more communicative and interactive methods aims to enhance students' speaking

abilities, boosting their confidence and effectiveness in English communication. This development strengthens their linguistic competence and expands opportunities in today's interconnected global environment. With the rapid growth of technology, platforms like EnglishCentral, founded in 2019, offer valuable tools for enhancing students' English skills. EnglishCentral promotes interactive learning through videos that enhance pronunciation and vocabulary. Its speech recognition gives instant feedback, supporting speaking practice in a low-pressure environment. This helps develop students' speaking skills and confidence in using English daily.

Although technology has great potential for language learning, SMP 17 Medan has not fully utilized it due to limited access and teachers' lack of digital literacy. This has hindered effective classroom integration and limited students' opportunities to develop their speaking skills through interactive, technology-based methods. Classroom observations showed that most students remained passive during speaking activities, with very few willing to communicate in English without being prompted by the teacher. This gap became evident during the PLP 2 program at SMP 17 in September 2024. At the beginning of the program, students were observed to have low interest in learning English, particularly in speaking. Classroom observations also showed that most students remained passive during speaking activities, with very few willing to communicate in English without being prompted by the teacher. To address this issue, the EnglishCentral application was introduced as a technology-based tool aimed at enhancing English skills, especially in speaking. Its implementation

encouraged students to become more active and engaged in the learning process, which positively influenced the development of their speaking abilities. Based on these findings, the study aims to examine the effect of EnglishCentral on students' speaking ability.

Research by Muhamad Idrus (2021), which explored the impact of AI-based technology in SMPN 1 Majasari Pandeglang students' speaking skills and learning motivation. The findings showed that AI applications like Google Lens significantly improved speaking ability, with the experimental group achieving higher N-Gain scores than the control group. Moreover, students using AI demonstrated greater motivation due to gamification and personalized features. The study concluded that AI has a strong simultaneous impact on speaking skill improvement and student engagement. Therefore, the use of AI-based tools is highly recommended for English teachers at the secondary level.

Furthermore, Madhavi (2023) mention that the findings indicated that employing the Lingodeer platform led to substantial enhancements in learners' oral proficiency, academic performance in English, and overall engagement. Such outcomes were reflected in the final assessment results, where the group receiving the intervention outperformed the comparison group by a considerable margin. These results affirm the platform's efficacy as a pedagogical resource and underscore the necessity for educators to adopt innovative approaches when integrating digital tools into instructional settings.

Similarly, Tiowardhana (2024) developed an Android-based English learning application called *Chat Lang*. The app employs a rule-based response

system and Firebase for data management, supporting students' autonomous learning. Trial results showed that *Chat Lang* delivered quick, structured responses, enhanced student participation, and successfully offers an innovative and functional learning tool.

The integration of technology, including AI-based tools and platforms like EnglishCentral, significantly enhances students' English skills, particularly in speaking (Rukiati et al., 2023). These tools provide interactive content, instant feedback, and features that improve pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary while increasing motivation and confidence. They also support independent learning, enabling students to practice autonomously and monitor their progress. As a result, technology not only improves language learning but also fosters learner autonomy in speaking (Mehdiyev, 2020).

The present study seeks to examine how the EnglishCentral platform influences the oral proficiency of eighth-grade learners at SMP 17 Medan, employing a quantitative experimental framework. This digital tool offers real-time corrective input concerning articulation and smoothness of speech, thereby enabling students to engage in spoken practice within a low-anxiety setting. Through its interactive functionalities and voice-recognition capabilities, the platform supports learners in refining their spoken delivery while simultaneously fostering greater self-assurance. This investigation will assess whether a notable disparity in oral competence exists between learners exposed to EnglishCentral and those receiving traditional instructional approaches.

1.2 Research Problem

Does EnglishCentral significantly affect speaking ability?

1.3 Research Objectives

To find out whether English Central has a significant influence on students' speaking ability.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The present investigation concentrates on how the EnglishCentral platform shapes the oral proficiency of learners, with a particular emphasis on those in the eighth grade at SMP Negeri 17 Medan. The research emphasizes two main aspects of speaking: vocabulary accuracy and pronunciation accuracy. The study investigates how the integration of EnglishCentral can improve these aspects. The study is limited in several ways. First, it only involves 8th grade students at SMP Negeri 17 Medan, which means the findings may not be generalizable to students of other grades or schools. Second, the research specifically focuses on speaking practice using asking and giving opinion as the learning material, excluding other types of texts or speaking activities. Third, the data collection is conducted over a limited academic period.

1.5 The Significance of Study

1. Theoretically, this study enriches the body of knowledge related to the effectiveness of interactive video-based platforms in developing speaking skills among Indonesian secondary school students. The results can serve as a theoretical foundation for understanding how immediate feedback

mechanisms and adaptive learning features influence learners' vocabulary and pronunciation accuracy.

Practically

For teachers: The findings provide English teachers with empirical evidence on the effectiveness of technology-based applications in teaching speaking skills. Teachers can use the results to consider integrating EnglishCentral or similar digital platforms into their instructional strategies, offering more varied and engaging learning methods. This study also encourages teachers to explore innovative teaching approaches that address the limitations of traditional methods, particularly in developing students' speaking ability through interactive and technology-enhanced instruction.

For students: This study offers students an alternative and innovative approach to improving their speaking ability, particularly in vocabulary accuracy and pronunciation accuracy. By utilizing EnglishCentral, students can access interactive learning experiences with immediate feedback, which may help them identify their weaknesses and monitor their progress in speaking English.

For future researchers: The results of this study serve as a reference and foundation for future studies in the field of technology-assisted language learning, especially in speaking skill development.