

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This section structures the foundational framework of the thesis into five key segments, comprehensively addressing: the research background, research problem, objectives, hypothesis, significance, scope and limitations, alongside definitions of essential terminology.

1.1 Research Background

Currently, a considerable global demand exists for individuals who possess strong English-speaking skills, a need that is especially pronounced in developing nations. English serves as the medium of instruction in the secondary and tertiary education systems of numerous countries, and corporations are increasingly prioritizing the hiring of individuals with strong English oral skills. Consequently, it is vital for students to develop effective spoken English abilities and for educators to be equipped with successful methods for teaching speaking. Despite many teachers' expertise in delivering vocabulary and grammar lessons for text translation and exam preparation, designing practical speaking activities remains a significant hurdle for both teachers and students. (Baker and Westrup 2003).

The lack of success in teaching speaking skills still often occurs in Indonesia due to several reasons. Firstly, students often lack vocabulary, which hampers their

ability to express themselves effectively. Secondly, there is a deficiency in grammar proficiency, hindering their understanding and construction of English sentences.

Thirdly, many students struggle with correct English pronunciation, as they lack exposure to native-like expressions and intonation (Wahyuningsih and Afandi 2020).

Additionally, students' knowledge of English outside the classroom is limited, affecting their overall proficiency. Furthermore, a lack of confidence to speak up and participate actively in English conversations is prevalent among students. These challenges are particularly evident in various educational settings across Indonesia, including observations at SMAN 1 Srengat, where students often exhibit similar difficulties in their English-speaking proficiency. According to Nation & Macalister (Nation and Macalister 2010), the underdevelopment of English-speaking curriculum exacerbates these issues. The inadequate curriculum design restricts English teachers from exercising creativity and flexibility in their teaching approaches, as they are bound by curriculum guidelines. This deficiency in curriculum design has consequently impacted English language learning, restricting the effectiveness of English teaching methodologies.

Consistent with these issues, several studies have explored problems with English speaking and potential technological solutions. Firstly, a study was conducted by Mutiara (Rahayu 2016), entitled "The Effectiveness of Speech-Ace Website to Students' Pronunciation", who experimented the Speech-Ace website to improve the college students' speaking skill in the third grade of Tidar University with number of 30 students. The problem found was about lack of awareness of proper English pronunciation.

This concern challenges the effectiveness of existing language instruction approaches and underscores the need for targeted solutions. A resulting lack of practice contributes to students' underdeveloped pronunciation skills. Consequently, this research was undertaken to investigate, through a case study approach, the effectiveness of Web Speechace in addressing students' speaking skills. Ultimately, following the treatments, significant improvements in pronunciation skills were observed, alongside increased student confidence in articulating English words and sentences.

Additionally, Nguyen Ngoc Vu. et al. (2025) conducted a research titled 'The Impact of Speechace on EFL Learners' Pronunciation Competency,' which examined how the Speechace pronunciation assessment tool enhances pronunciation competence among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Vietnam. Findings from the research revealed that quantitatively, there was a significant enhancement in the pronunciation scores of the experimental group who used Web Speechace, contrasting with the control group's results. Meanwhile, qualitative information gathered through questionnaires and interviews suggested students perceived Web Speechace as a beneficial and straightforward application, particularly valuing its detailed feedback, despite some technical challenges and a preference for human instruction for confidence. The research concluded that the integration of Speechace can substantially improve language acquisition and support English language teaching, while highlighting the need for teacher training and curriculum adaptation to maximize the potential of this technology.

Addressing similar concerns regarding speaking skills, Arry Pauji (2024) conducted complementary research entitled "Improving Junior High School Students' English-Speaking Skills Using the Speechace Application." This research involved 30 junior high school students from Tunas Karya Batang Kuis School as participants, focusing on the implementation of the Speechace application. This diagnostic phase necessitated alternative pedagogical interventions. Subsequent implementation of Speechace-mediated treatments yielded statistically significant improvements in students' speaking competencies.

Another case in proficiency elsewhere was found by Yuniar (2023) entitled "Speechace to Facilitate Students' Pronunciation Accuracy in the English Class: An Exploratory Study", where the fluency in speaking English was experienced by 10th grade students of SMAN 15 Surabaya. Students' limited confidence in speaking English stemmed from their inadequate pronunciation and fluency. In order to solve this case, the teacher had to apply learning media, but it was not found yet an appropriate tool that could assist the students in pronouncing words well. Thus, the researcher tried to explore how Speechace impacted on students' fluency and pronunciation. Based on his findings, Speechace was able to facilitate the students English as improving pronunciation media. It also gave students interest to speak English with good pronunciation. This improvement was proven by how Speechace corrected their speech in the form of statistical diagram.

Additionally, Mazliyana Z. et al. (2022), the research entitled “Utilizing Speechace to Enhance Speaking Skills among English as a Second Language Pre-University Students”. Speechace, an AI-based tool, was implemented to enhance the speaking skills of English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The research findings revealed that student participants agreed on the utility and user-friendliness of Speechace, demonstrating positive attitudes and strong behavioral intentions toward its usage. Furthermore, teachers expressed favorable attitudes regarding the integration of Web Speechace as a pedagogical instrument in ESL speaking instruction.

In response to the outlined challenges, this research investigates Web Speechace efficacy as a digital pedagogical resource for eleventh-grade students' speaking at SMAN 1 Srengat. Implementing this platform is anticipated to increase interactivity and engagement in oral language instruction, thereby supporting core objectives of the English curriculum. Using technology to educate and learn effectively is one method to make teaching interesting. Research indicates that technology-integrated learning designs foster students' conceptual innovation and speaking skill progression through self-directed learning mechanisms Hwang (2015). This methodology motivates learners to develop novel ideas as outcomes of scaffolded educational experiences. Furthermore, S. E. Smaldino et al (2019) empirically validate that educational technology significantly boosts learner enthusiasm and active classroom engagement.

The researcher conducted preliminary research on students' difficulties in learning speaking at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat, a high school in Blitar Regency. The selection of SMA Negeri 1 Srengat as the research site is due to its alignment with the criteria established in previous studies. The identical issue also occurred among the students of class XI -C1 at SMAN 1 Srengat, particularly in the acquisition of descriptive text language skills. An interview with Mr. H, an 11th grade English teacher, on January 6th, 2025, revealed that students were unsuccessful on the block speaking test concerning descriptive text. The average score was an unsatisfactory 70. (For further information about the students' block test result see appendix 2a) That result was under the requirement of the school standard (76.00).

Based on an interview conducted with an English teacher at SMAN 1 Srengat, Mr. H, on January 6th, 2024, eleventh-grade students, particularly those in class XI-C1, reported that mostly the students' difficulties lay in pronunciation and structuring their thoughts into cohesive phrases based on the context of the procedure. This is primarily attributed to their limited ability to speak English. Detailed information regarding the teacher's interview can be found in Appendix 1a. Additionally, interviews conducted with several students from class XI-C1 also revealed that students struggle to practice speaking English consistently and fluently due to inadequate speaking activities and a fear of grammatical and pronunciation errors. Consequently, 11th-grade students have difficulties in enhancing their speaking skills and frequently exhibit a deficiency in confidence when engaging actively in class. Further information on the student interviews can be found in Appendix 1b.

To corroborate the gathered information, the researcher consulted Mr. H regarding students' speaking scores. Document analysis revealed that Class XI-C1 achieved an average score of 70.18 on the descriptive text speaking test in the topic describing environment, falling below the school's minimum requirement of 76.00. As illustrated in Appendix 2b, the score graph shows the results of the student speaking skills at SMAN 1 Srengat based on the speaking test. The data shows that the highest score was recorded in class XI-A1 with a score of 78, followed by class XI-B1 with a score of 77. However, there was significant variation among the other classes, with some classes, such as XI-C1 and XI-E2, scoring lower, at 70. Based on Mr. H's recommendation, the researcher subsequently focused the investigation on class XI-C1.

The preliminary study showed that 11th grade students at SMAN 1 Srengat frequently struggle with fluency, pronunciation, and structuring their thoughts into cohesive phrases when learning to speak. These difficulties frequently prevent students from speaking publicly during class and from expressing themselves with confidence. Given the importance of speaking skill, incorporating digital tools into language classrooms motivates learners and allows them to practice language skills in authentic and interactive ways (Harmer, 2007). To improve their speaking skills, teachers can employ relevant media. Mutiara et al. (2024) showed that Speechace efficiently aids students in enhancing their pronunciation via organized activities and performance analytics. With an easy-to-use interface, individuals may access interactive speaking exercises and receive immediate feedback. Speechace offers a comprehensive analysis of the areas in which students want improve.

In terms of facilities, SMA Negeri 1 Srengat has a Language Lab, sufficient classrooms, additional equipment for English learning such as LCD Projectors and speakers. In terms of the curriculum used by the school, at that time the school used the 2013 curriculum for 12th grade and the Merdeka Curriculum for 10th and 11th grade. When viewed the ease of application of learning, teachers preferred to teach using the Merdeka Curriculum because it was designed to provide teachers flexibility in creativity such as creating their own teaching modules or teaching methods that are considered more effective. However, students taught under the Merdeka Curriculum still have difficulty in communicating using English through interviewed with student's 11th grade at SMAN 1 Srengat.

The researcher found out about speaking and pronunciation problems. Researchers inquired about the speaking classes' experiences. They clarified that, despite its importance, they believed that schooling was still insufficient to thoroughly grasp English. In order to learn English, the interviewees disclosed that they needed to study on their own outside of the classroom. Additionally, they said that additional in-depth activities needed to be added to the educational materials provided by schools because they were still insufficiently interactive for speaking skills. They added that due to their poor pronunciation and fluency, all of their peers still needed help improving their speaking skills. Therefore, the researcher found a gap here that there should be a medium to improve students' pronunciation to measure their interest in speaking English, and improve their pronunciation. This study seeks to bridge that gap, providing empirical evidence for the application's impact within this specific educational setting. The factors mentioned above the students feel less motivated in learning and difficulty in speaking English.

Therefore, the researcher used a new learning medium that allows to practice students' speaking skills. This medium is Web Speechace, an AI-powered website designed to train students' pronunciation and fluency. Seeing the function of the website and its advantages, the researcher wanted to test it in this research entitled, "The Effectiveness of Web Speechace for Eleventh Grade Students' Speaking Skills at SMAN 1 Srengat."

1.2 Research Problem

The above-described research background informs the following research problem, which can be stated:

- 1) How is efficacy of Web Speechace for teaching speaking skill on the eleventh-grade students' at SMAN 1 Srengat?

1.3 Research Objective

The objective of this research was to find out the efficacy of using the Web Speechace for the 11th grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

Hypotheses that can be taken in this research are as follows:

- a) If H_a (Alternative Hypothesis) is accepted; Web Speechace is effective for the eleventh-grade students' speaking skill at SMAN 1 Srengat.
- b) If H_o (Null Hypothesis) is accepted; Web Speechace is not effective for the eleventh-grade students' speaking skill at SMAN 1 Srengat.

1.5 Research Significance

The following benefits can be obtained from this research:

1.5.1. For Students

Web Speechace is useful for students in learning because Web Speechace provides real-time feedback that helps correct pronunciation errors and improve speaking skills. It boosts students' confidence, supports personalized learning based on individual proficiency levels, and allows flexible practice anytime through various devices. With interactive exercises and assessments, students can track their progress and adapt their learning strategies effectively.

1.5.2. English Teachers

The benefits of Web Speechace for teachers are that it helps enhance interactive learning through immediate feedback on students' pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary and grammar. It reduces the teacher's burden of correcting repeated errors, provides objective data on student progress and errors, and simplifies the oral assessment process. Thus, teachers can design more effective, efficient and data-driven lessons.

1.5.3. For Future Researchers

This research also holds valuable significance for future researchers interested in the use of digital tools for language learning, particularly speaking skill development. Firstly, this research contributes empirical data on the effectiveness of Web Speechace in a specific Indonesian EFL context, namely with eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Srengat. The findings provide a specific result that future

researchers can utilize for comparative studies, meta-analyses, or to build upon in exploring the tool's efficacy in different settings or populations. Secondly, the methodology employed in this research, including the integration of Web Speechace activities within classroom interventions and the assessment approach, can offer practical insights and a potential model for researchers planning similar technology-enhanced language learning studies. Furthermore, the identification of specific areas of improvement observed in students' speaking skills after the intervention, along with any limitations encountered during the research process, can highlight potential avenues for future studies, such as investigating longitudinal effects, exploring different features of Web Speechace, or comparing its effectiveness with other tools. In essence, this research serves as a foundational step that informs and encourages further investigation into the role of Web Speechace and similar applications in enhancing speaking proficiency within the Indonesian educational landscape.

1.6 Research Scope and Limitation

Certain scopes and limits guide the conduct of this research. The following outlines the study's scope and limits:

1.6.1. Research Scope

This research primarily focuses on investigating the effectiveness of Web Speechace as a digital learning tool for enhancing students' speaking skill. The research specifically involves the eleventh-grade students of class XI-C1 at SMAN1 Srengat during the academic year 2024/2025. text contextually. The intervention applied comprises four treatments conducted over approximately one

month (from January to February 2025), where students engaged in speaking practice facilitated by Web Speechace. The speaking skill itself is assessed across its key aspects, including pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar, utilizing a pre-test and post-test design. Furthermore, the selection of speaking practice topics throughout the pre-test, treatment, and post-test phases is specifically adjusted to the descriptive text contextually, aligning with the Speaking element in Learning Outcomes from the Learning Flow and Objectives (ATP) within the Independent Curriculum implemented at SMAN 1 Srengat.

1.6.2. Research Limitation

This research is conducted in Senior High School and targeted to the eleventh students of SMAN 1 Srengat. The number of tested students is 32. The participants were eleventh-grade students in XI-C1 chosen by purposive sampling. The researcher applied Web Speechace, which especially focuses on training the students' English pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary to evaluate students' speaking proficiency.

The intervention involving Web Speechace was implemented over a relatively short duration of four treatments, which might not fully capture the long-term effects or sustained impact of the application on students' speaking proficiency. Web Speechace provides automated feedback on various speaking aspects and the results are displayed in the form of statistical rating based on the scoring rubric of Speechace. The primary assessment relied on its automated scoring; this method may not fully capture the complex nuances of communicative competence in real-life interactions, which a human evaluator could perceive. Although efforts were made to control variables, the potential influence of other extraneous factors outside

the direct intervention cannot be entirely ruled out. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

1.7.1. Web Speechace

Website Speechace refers to an advanced online speech recognition tool designed to assess pronunciation and fluency with unmatched accuracy. It's tailored for language assessment, featuring advanced algorithms that set it apart. Whether in education or professional settings, Speechace provides precise feedback, helping users improve speaking skills confidently. Its easy-to-use interface makes it popular among educators, researchers, and learners, fostering linguistic proficiency. In summary, Website Speechace is the ultimate tool for mastering pronunciation and fluency effortlessly.

1.7.2. Speaking Skill

This speaking skill refers to the speaking ability to effectively communicate orally in English. Specifically, it encompasses various sub-skills including pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar of eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Srengat. During the treatment period, these students are trained using Web Speechace one by one with topics that are tailored to the flow of learning objectives and learning challenges. Researchers focus on the use of descriptive texts as a reference for given topics by considering text structure, linguistic elements, and social functions correctly and according to context.

1.7.3. Eleventh Grade Students

These eleventh-grades became the subjects of research on the use of Web Speechace. Specifically, the participants are students from class XI-C1, who were recommended by the English teacher responsible for their English language learning. These class XI-C1 students are already in an active learning period and can follow the flow of learning objectives from the Merdeka Curriculum. Their engagement in this curriculum allows them to explore various learning methods, making them suitable candidates for this study.