

AI Era: Using Hablo to Improve the Students' English-Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

English is no longer an exclusive language because it is now learned by people worldwide. In Indonesia, English plays a significant role in various domains, including society, business, politics, technological development, and education. However, Indonesian students often feel shy about speaking English when they believe they have not mastered the language. It is crucial for students to develop English-speaking skills to communicate effectively. Yet, speaking is a challenging skill to master. The third-semester students of STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung in the academic year 2024/2025 faced several difficulties in speaking English, including a limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, a lack of interlocutors, and minimal opportunities for extended interaction in English. To address these challenges, the researchers used Hablo, an application that integrates artificial intelligence features with English language learning. This study employed classroom action research conducted over two cycles. The results demonstrated significant improvements in both the students' speaking skills and their learning activities across the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The mean speaking test score increased from 64.8 in the pre-cycle to 67 in Cycle I and further to 77.75 in Cycle II. The findings indicate that using Hablo positively impacts students' speaking abilities and engagement in learning. This research highlights the potential of integrating AI-powered tools, like Hablo, into English language teaching to address students' specific challenges in speaking. The study suggests that such tools can enhance vocabulary acquisition, improve pronunciation, and provide opportunities for interactive learning. These findings emphasize the importance of leveraging technology to create engaging and effective language-learning environments.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Herlisya and Wiratno (2022), language learning has been significant throughout history. Foreign language education in Indonesia dates back to the colonial era when people were compelled to learn languages like Dutch, Japanese, and English. At that time, foreign language education was limited to certain schools and individuals of noble descent. Proficiency in foreign languages elevated social status, indicating that Indonesians were accustomed to foreign language learning, though motivation varied depending on personal interests.

Today, English is no longer a luxury. Alfarisy (2021) states that learning foreign languages is now accessible to everyone, with English often introduced to children at an early age. In

Indonesia, English plays a pivotal role in society, business, politics, technological advancements, and education. Despite advancements, many public and private schools struggle to provide equitable access to quality English education. Among the four essential language skills—writing, speaking, listening, and reading—speaking is crucial. However, as noted by Herlisya and Wiratno (2022), students often feel shy speaking English when they lack mastery. Alvionita et al. (2022) identified two factors impeding students' oral communication: internal factors like self-doubt and external factors like insufficient practice.

In preliminary research at STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung, third-semester English department students displayed low participation during lessons, limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and low self-confidence. Hastomo et al. (2024) emphasize that English learners need high self-confidence to develop skills. Additionally, frequent use of Indonesian in informal settings reduces opportunities to practice English, diminishing motivation (Herlisya & Wiratno, 2022).

To address these challenges, the researchers used *Hablo*, an AI-powered application. In the digital era, incorporating AI tools can enhance students' motivation and create engaging learning experiences. AI systems like *Hablo* enable real-time feedback and personalized learning by analyzing students' performance and providing tailored resources (Garpersz & Uktolseja, 2020; Luckin et al., 2016). *Hablo* acts as a speaking AI tutor, allowing students to practice conversations without fear of judgment. This fosters confidence and improves speaking skills, as the AI provides immediate corrections and feedback.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

English is widely regarded as the language of international communication. While it serves as a first or second language in many countries, in Indonesia, it remains a foreign language. Consequently, English is primarily taught in schools, from the early levels to universities, for educational purposes rather than as a second language for daily communication. English has become a crucial requirement, tested in national exams, school and college entrance tests, and job selection processes. This has made English mastery important not only for students but for everyone. Among the four key skills in English—speaking, reading, writing, and listening—speaking is the most vital for communication. Istiara et al. (2023) emphasized the necessity of practical speaking skills in the globalization era. However, as Herlisya and Wiratno (2022) pointed out, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for students, as many feel shy and unconfident in using a foreign language. Even students in English education programs often struggle with oral communication despite excelling in reading and writing (Herlisya & Wiratno, 2023).

Speaking proficiency is critical not only for academic success but also for career opportunities and business interactions. English serves as a global communication tool, facilitating transactions and bridging cultural differences. Teaching speaking requires targeted and up-to-date methods to ensure effectiveness. According to Herlisya and Wiratno (2023), teachers must continuously innovate and implement engaging techniques to enhance students' speaking abilities.

In the digital era, the use of gadgets has become widespread, with students relying heavily on them for both entertainment and information. Gadgets offer significant potential in education, as they host various applications designed to facilitate learning. Apriyanti et al. (2022) defined learning media as resources developed alongside technological advancements, ranging from audio-visual tools to interactive applications. One such tool is *Hablo: English Speaking Tutor*, an artificial intelligence application launched in May 2024 by Pixelcell Limited, a company renowned for its innovative AI applications. *Hablo* aims to improve speaking skills through engaging features, including personalized study plans, contextual themes, and interactive speaking models such as "Follow to Speak," "Tutor Q&A," and "Roleplay."

Using *Hablo*, students can receive instant feedback, practice speaking without fear of judgment, and engage with AI tutors for customized learning. The application categorizes users

into five levels, from beginner (A0) to advanced (B2), based on an initial placement test. Lessons cover diverse themes, such as travel, sports, and emotions, ensuring contextual relevance. The integration of Hablo into learning involves six steps: downloading the app, completing a level test, following AI-generated study plans, engaging in interactive learning models, receiving teacher support, and sharing learning experiences in discussions (Budiharto et al., 2020).

Hablo enhances students' vocabulary, listening, and pronunciation skills, making language learning more engaging and relevant. By incorporating tools like Hablo, educators can effectively address speaking challenges, boosting students' confidence and enthusiasm for learning English in the digital era.

METHOD

According to Garpersz and Uktolseja (2020), Classroom Action Research (CAR) is a reflective research method that involves specific actions to improve learning practices professionally. It holds a critical role in scientific research as it determines the quality of research outcomes. In this study, the researchers utilized CAR to enhance students' speaking skills using Hablo: AI Tutor, a program designed to assist students in improving their speaking abilities. CAR is conducted by teachers in their classrooms through self-reflection, aiming to enhance their teaching performance, which subsequently improves student learning outcomes (Mullany & Stockwell, 2021).

This research was conducted at STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung, involving third-semester college students from the English department during the 2024/2025 academic year. The primary focus of the study was on improving students' speaking skills. The researchers implemented two cycles of CAR, following the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which includes four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Burns, 2010).

Data collection methods involved tests and non-test techniques. As explained by Taherdoost (2021), a test is a tool for measuring students' abilities, mastery, or achievements, while non-test techniques involve non-evaluative methods. In this study, speaking tests were used to assess students' abilities. The students were asked to describe topics such as daily life, people, places, or instructions for creating something. The assessment rubric for speaking, adapted from Brown (2001), evaluated five criteria: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. This structured approach provided a comprehensive understanding of students' speaking skill levels.

Table 1. The scoring rubric of speaking based on Brown (2001)

| Score | Grammar | Vocabulary | Comprehension | Fluency | Pronunciation |
|-------|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | Errors in grammar are frequent, but speaker can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigner. | Speaking vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs. | Within the scope of his very limited language experience, can understand simple questions and statements if delivered with slowed speech, repetition or paraphrase. | (no specific fluency description. Refer to other four language areas for implied level of fluency. | Errors in pronunciation are frequent but can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak his language. |
| 2 | Can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have through or | Has speaking vocabulary sufficient to express himself simply with some circumlocutions. | Can get the gist of most conversation of non-technical subjects (i.e., topics that require no specialized knowledge). | Can handle with confidence but not with facility most social situations, including introductions and casual | Accent is intelligible though often quite faulty. |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| | confident control of the grammar. | | | conversations about current events, as well as work, family and autobiographical information. | |
| 3 | Control of grammar is good. Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. | Able to speak the language with sufficient vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Vocabulary is broad enough that he rarely has to grope for a word. | Comprehension is quite complete at a normal rate of speech. | Can discuss particular interests of competence with reasonable ease. Rarely has to grope for words. | Errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker. Accent may be obviously foreign, |
| 4 | Able to use the language accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Errors in grammar are quite rare. | Can understand and participate in any conversation within the range of his experience with a high degree of precision of vocabulary. | Can understand any conversation within the range of his experience. | Able to use the language fluently on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Can participate in any conversation within the range of this experience with high degree of fluency. | Errors in pronunciation are quite rare. |
| 5 | Equivalent to that of an educated native speaker. | Speech on all levels is fully accepted by educated native speakers in all its features including breadth of vocabulary and idioms, colloquialism and pertinent cultural references. | Equivalent to that of an educated native speaker. | Has complete fluency in the language such that his speech is fully accepted by educated native speakers. | Equivalent to and fully accepted by educated native speakers. |

An observation sheet was also used to measure the students' activities during the teaching and learning process. Non-test techniques included documentation, such as photos, to collect data. Documentation containing relevant information served as evidence of the research process. To analyze the data on students' average scores, this study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. These methods were employed to determine the effect of Hablo on students' speaking skills and learning activities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the quantitative data analysis indicate that the use of the Hablo application effectively improved the English speaking skills of third-semester English education students at STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung. This improvement is evident from the average test scores achieved by the students. In Cycle I, the mean score of students' learning activities was 67, categorized as "less active." In Cycle II, the mean score increased to 77.75, categorized as "quite active," representing an improvement of 10.75 points in students' learning activity levels.

Similarly, the improvement in students' speaking skills was notable. In the pre-cycle, the mean score was 64.8, with only one student (20%) achieving the target score. In Cycle I, the mean score increased to 67, with seven students (30%) achieving scores above the minimum mastery criteria. By Cycle II, the mean score further improved to 77.75, with 13 students (60%) achieving scores above the minimum mastery criteria. The figure below illustrates the improvement in learning activities among the third-semester English education students at STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung.

Table 2. The result of students' learning activity

| Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 | Improvement |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Average score 67 | Average score 77.75 | 10,75 |

The data above clearly indicates that students' learning activities improved from Cycle I to Cycle II. This improvement can be attributed to the implementation of the Hablo application, which effectively enhanced students' speaking abilities. The results also demonstrate a significant improvement in students' speaking scores across the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The mean score of the speaking test in the pre-cycle was 64.8, which increased to 67 in Cycle I and further improved to 77.75 in Cycle II.

Table 3. The result of students' score in speaking skill.

| Mean Score | | |
|------------|---------|---------|
| Pre cycle | Cycle 1 | Cycle 2 |
| 64.8 | 67 | 77.75 |

The results and data analysis indicate that the level of students' learning activities is increasing. According to the researchers, using the Hablo app can enhance students' interest in learning. Hablo not only improves speaking skills but also helps develop pronunciation, vocabulary, and listening skills.

The findings from this study align with prior research emphasizing the role of technology in enhancing language learning outcomes. The use of the Hablo application significantly improved students' English-speaking skills and learning activities. This improvement, observed in the transition from pre-cycle to Cycle II, demonstrates the app's effectiveness in providing interactive, personalized learning experiences. Previous research by Luckin et al. (2016) highlights the potential of AI-powered tools to individualize learning, offering real-time feedback and promoting student engagement. Similarly, the results of this study confirm that AI applications like Hablo can motivate learners by providing an engaging platform for practicing speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary, and listening skills. The students' mean scores showed a clear progression from "less active" learning in Cycle I to "quite active" learning in Cycle II, reinforcing the argument that well-designed AI tools can positively influence learner activity and outcomes.

In addition, these findings align with Herlisya and Wiratno's (2022) assertion that students often hesitate to speak in a foreign language due to a lack of confidence and limited practice opportunities. The Hablo application addresses these issues by offering a judgment-free environment where students can practice at their own pace. The improvement in students' speaking scores—rising from 64.8 in the pre-cycle to 77.75 in Cycle II—supports Bartneck et al.'s

(2021) claim that AI systems can enhance language proficiency by simulating human-like interactions. Furthermore, the study also reflects Burns' (2010) model of Classroom Action Research, demonstrating the practical effectiveness of iterative planning, action, observation, and reflection in addressing classroom challenges. These findings suggest that incorporating AI tools in English Language Teaching (ELT) can bridge gaps in traditional methodologies, particularly in speaking instruction, making it more effective and accessible for learners. Future studies could explore the long-term impacts of such applications and their adaptability in diverse learning contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

Hablo: AI Tutor is one of the recommended applications for learning English, especially speaking skills. With its innovative features, Hablo provides a unique learning experience by offering 24-hour availability, contextual chat themes, and the flexibility to learn anywhere and anytime. However, this study identified some limitations. Hablo is currently only available for iPhone and iPad users, which poses accessibility challenges for Android users. Additionally, the application is paid, with only a seven-day free trial, limiting its long-term use for students who cannot afford it. To address these challenges, teachers must assess the technological readiness of their students and provide support, such as lending compatible devices or exploring alternative funding solutions.

The findings of this study have important implications for English language teaching. Integrating AI tools like Hablo into classrooms can enhance student engagement, improve speaking skills, and create more flexible learning environments. However, its effectiveness depends on equitable access and teacher facilitation. Future research could explore the development of similar AI tools that are platform-agnostic, making them accessible to a broader range of users. Additionally, studies should investigate strategies to reduce the financial burden on students, such as institutional subscriptions or sponsorships, and examine the long-term impacts of AI-powered learning tools on language acquisition and motivation.

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