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Original Article

The Exploration of Interlocutors and Technological Support Systems on Student's Speaking Skill Development

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Abstract

Speaking skill development remains a major challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners due to limited opportunities for authentic communication, and insufficient speaking practice. This study explored the roles of interlocutors and technological support systems in supporting students' speaking development at IAIN Langsa. The participants were five English department students at IAIN Langsa. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their experiences in classroom interaction, online communication, and technology-assisted speaking practice. This study employed an exploratory qualitative design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and forum group discussion and analyzed using thematic analysis, including coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation. The findings indicate that interaction with classmates, online speaking partners, and interlocutors contributed significantly to students' fluency, spontaneity, and communicative adaptability. Technological tools such as WhatsApp, YouTube, and ELSA Speak supported autonomous learning, pronunciation improvement, and communication confidence through repeated exposure and continuous practice. Despite these benefits, participants continued to face challenges related to speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, and inconsistent opportunities for speaking practice. The study concludes that speaking development is enhanced when authentic communicative interaction is integrated with technology-assisted learning environments. The findings suggest that EFL instructors should design interaction-rich learning activities and incorporate supportive digital technologies to foster more effective and sustainable speaking development.

Keywords: Communicative Interaction, EFL Learners, Interlocutors, Speaking Development, Technological Support Systems.

1. Introduction

Speaking is considered one of the most essential yet challenging skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it requires learners to produce language spontaneously, accurately, and fluently in real communication contexts. Unlike reading or writing, speaking involves immediate interaction, pronunciation control, vocabulary retrieval, grammatical accuracy, and communicative confidence at the same time. In Indonesian EFL contexts, students often experience difficulties in developing speaking competence because opportunities for authentic communication in English remain limited. Classroom instruction frequently focuses more on theoretical understanding of grammar and written exercises rather than communicative practice. As a result, many university students possess sufficient knowledge of English structures but still struggle to express ideas orally in natural communication situations. This condition encourages learners to seek alternative speaking

environments outside formal classrooms through digital media and interaction with various interlocutors.

The advancement of educational technology has created broader opportunities for EFL learners to practice speaking skills through online platforms and digital applications. Recent studies demonstrate that technology-assisted learning positively contributes to students' speaking development. Sherine et al. (2020) found that WhatsApp interaction significantly improved learners' speaking performance because the application enabled continuous communication and encouraged active language production in informal contexts. Similarly, Purwanti et al. (2022) explained that YouTube videos help learners improve pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, fluency, and confidence through exposure to authentic English input. Yusuf (2020) also emphasized that YouTube-based learning provides contextual speaking models that increase students' engagement and motivation in speaking activities. Besides social media platforms, language-learning applications such as ELSA Speak also support speaking development by offering pronunciation training and immediate feedback. Samad and Ismail (2020) revealed that the ELSA Speak application effectively enhances learners' pronunciation accuracy and self-confidence because students can repeatedly practice speaking independently. These findings indicate that technological tools provide flexible and accessible learning environments that facilitate speaking practice beyond traditional classrooms.

In addition to technological support, interaction with interlocutors plays a significant role in speaking skill development. Speaking competence develops through meaningful communication where learners negotiate meaning, receive feedback, and adapt language use according to communicative situations. Interaction with classmates, and online speaking partners allows learners to experience authentic communication practices that contribute to fluency and comprehensibility improvement. Handayani (2024) reported that students perceived positive improvements in confidence and speaking ability after engaging in speaking practice with foreign interlocutors through online platforms. Choi further explained that interactive communication contributes to spoken fluency development because learners adjust their language use and communication strategies during interaction. Likewise, Peltonen (2022) argued that speaking interaction activities encourage learners to solve communication problems collaboratively, which enhances fluency and interactional competence. Through these interactions, interlocutors function not only as communication partners but also as providers of linguistic input, corrective feedback, and motivational support.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of speaking interaction depends on several factors, including interlocutor responsiveness, communication quality, and learners' adaptation abilities. Cai (2022) explained that learners interacting with interlocutors from different dialect backgrounds often experience comprehension challenges that require adaptive communication strategies. Similarly, Nagle et al. (2022) emphasized that speaking comprehensibility is influenced by interactional dynamics between speakers and interlocutors rather than by the speaker alone. These findings suggest that speaking development requires supportive interactional environments that enable learners to communicate comfortably while receiving constructive feedback. Without proper support and guidance, speaking interaction may become less effective and potentially reduce learners' confidence. Therefore, interlocutors and technological support systems should be viewed as complementary elements that work together in facilitating speaking development.

Several previous studies have investigated technology-assisted speaking learning and interaction-based speaking practices separately. Asratie et al. (2023) found that educational technology tools significantly improve EFL students' speaking performance by increasing

communicative opportunities and learner motivation. Phạm and Nguyen (2022) also reported that technology-supported instruction positively affects students' speaking confidence and classroom participation. Furthermore, Rashid et al. (2017) demonstrated that virtual speaking buddy programs create interactive communication environments that help learners reduce speaking anxiety and improve fluency. In institutional contexts, Dzięcioł-Pędich and Dudzik (2021) explained that integrating technology into speaking instruction enhances students' engagement and communicative participation in language learning activities. Ghasemi and Mozaheb (2021) additionally argued that practical speaking techniques combined with interactional activities contribute effectively to speaking fluency development. Other studies also confirmed the importance of systematic speaking training. (Benning et al., 2025) found that continuous public speaking training programs improve learners' speaking competence gradually over time, while Laske and Reed (2022) revealed that remote video-based speaking training increases learners' self-awareness and speaking confidence.

Despite the growing body of literature on technology-assisted speaking learning and interaction-based speaking practices, these two dimensions have predominantly been examined in isolation. A notable gap persists in research that simultaneously investigates how interlocutors and technological support systems converge to shape speaking development, particularly within Islamic higher education contexts in Indonesia. In the context of IAIN Langsa, English Education students actively utilize digital platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, ELSA Speak, and online speaking communities to support classroom learning. However, students' experiences and access to these support systems vary considerably depending on their motivation, confidence, technological familiarity, and communication opportunities. The absence of structured institutional speaking-support programs also encourages students to rely heavily on independent learning initiatives and informal interaction networks. Consequently, understanding how interlocutors and technological support systems contribute to students' speaking development becomes important for designing more effective speaking-learning environments.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the influence of interlocutors and technological support systems on the speaking development of English department students at IAIN Langsa. This study focuses on how various interlocutors, including classmates, interlocuters, and online speaking partners, contribute to students' speaking skill. In addition, the study investigates how technological support systems such as WhatsApp, YouTube, ELSA Speak, virtual speaking buddy programs, and classroom-based speaking activities facilitate students' speaking performance. The findings of this research are expected to contribute theoretically to EFL speaking development studies, particularly those related to interaction and technology-assisted language learning. Practically, this study may provide insights for educators and institutions in designing speaking-learning programs that integrate communicative interaction with technological support to create more effective and inclusive speaking environments for EFL learners.

Based on the background above, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do different types of interlocutors contribute to the development of speaking skills among students at IAIN Langsa? and (2) How do technological support systems contribute to the enhancement of students' speaking performance?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Speaking Skills in EFL Learning

Speaking competence in EFL contexts encompasses a multidimensional set of abilities, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary deployment, and communicative adaptability. Scholars broadly conceptualize speaking proficiency not merely as the capacity to produce grammatically correct utterances, but as the ability to engage in meaningful, contextually appropriate communication. Brown and Yule (1983) distinguished between transactional and interactional functions of speech, underscoring that effective speaking requires learners to manage both information exchange and interpersonal interaction simultaneously.

In EFL settings, the development of speaking competence is further complicated by limited exposure to authentic communicative contexts, psychological barriers such as anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, and insufficient opportunities for sustained oral practice. These challenges are particularly pronounced in Indonesian higher education contexts, where English instruction has traditionally privileged written accuracy over communicative fluency, rendering many students linguistically knowledgeable yet orally reticent.

2.2. The Role of Interlocutors in Speaking Development

Interlocutor interaction constitutes a foundational element in spoken language acquisition, grounded in the interactionist hypothesis which posits that meaning negotiation during conversational exchange facilitates language development. Long (1996) argued that interactional modifications prompted by communication breakdowns provide learners with comprehensible input and opportunities for corrective feedback, both of which are instrumental in advancing linguistic competence. Interaction with diverse interlocutors, encompassing peers, instructors, and proficient speakers, exposes learners to varied linguistic registers, discourse patterns, and communicative conventions.

Peltonen (2022) demonstrated that collaborative speaking interaction encourages learners to resolve communicative problems jointly, thereby enhancing interactional competence and spoken fluency. Furthermore, Nagle et al. (2022) established that speaking comprehensibility is co-constructed between speaker and interlocutor, suggesting that the quality of interactional engagement bears directly upon speaking development outcomes. Handayani (2024) similarly reported that engagement with foreign interlocutors through online platforms engendered marked improvements in students' communicative spontaneity.

2.3. Technology-Assisted Speaking Learning

The proliferation of digital technologies has substantially expanded the landscape of speaking practice beyond the confines of formal classrooms. Technology-assisted language learning platforms afford learners autonomous, flexible, and repeated exposure to spoken English, thereby compensating for the scarcity of authentic communicative opportunities in conventional instructional settings. Asratie et al. (2023) established that educational technology tools significantly enhance EFL students' speaking performance by augmenting communicative opportunities and sustaining learner motivation. Specific platforms have demonstrated distinct contributions to speaking development: WhatsApp facilitates informal yet continuous communicative practice (Sherine et al., 2020); YouTube provides contextually rich authentic input that models pronunciation, intonation, and discourse structure (Purwanti et al., 2022); and ELSA Speak delivers targeted pronunciation feedback through artificial intelligence-driven assessment, enabling learners to self-monitor and refine their spoken output independently (Samad & Ismail, 2020; Tapyor, 2026).

Phạm and Nguyen (2022) further reported that technology-supported instruction positively affects students' speaking confidence and classroom participation, whilst Rashid et al. (2017) demonstrated that virtual speaking buddy programs reduce communication anxiety and improve fluency through sustained interactive engagement. Collectively, these findings underscore that technology-assisted tools function most efficaciously when purposefully integrated with interactional speaking activities, rather than deployed as standalone resources divorced from authentic communicative contexts.

3. Methods

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to investigate the roles of interlocutors and technological support systems in the development of speaking skills among EFL learners. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding their speaking development processes within specific educational and social contexts. Qualitative research enables researchers to examine complex phenomena that cannot be fully understood through numerical measurement alone. Pitura (2022) explained that qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable for investigating speaking development in higher education because it provides deeper insights into learners' communicative experiences and interactional practices. In addition, Bolourchi and Soleimani (2021) emphasized that qualitative approaches allow researchers to explore learners' perceptions and emotional responses toward feedback and language-learning experiences in greater depth. Therefore, this study focused on understanding how students experience interaction with interlocutors and utilize technological support systems in improving their speaking abilities.

The participants of this study consisted of The participants were five English department students at IAIN Langsa who had experiences in classroom interaction, online communication, and technology-assisted speaking practice. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because this technique allows researchers to choose individuals who possess relevant experiences related to the research topic. The selected students were considered suitable participants because they had experienced both formal and informal English-speaking practices during their academic learning process. Handayani (2024) highlighted the importance of selecting participants who have direct experience interacting with interlocutors in online speaking practices to obtain rich qualitative data regarding speaking development. Similarly, Pitura (2022) stated that participants in qualitative speaking studies should possess sufficient communicative experience to provide meaningful reflections concerning their language-learning processes. Based on these considerations, this study involved students who regularly practiced English speaking through direct interaction, digital communication platforms, and classroom-based speaking activities.

Table 1. Participants' Profile

Participant Code	Semester	Speaking Practice Experience	Digital Platform Used
P1	8th Semester	Classroom & Online Practice	WhatsApp, YouTube
P2	8th Semester	Foreign Interlocutor Practice	ELSA Speak, Zoom
P3	8th Semester	Classroom Discussion	WhatsApp

Participant Code	Semester	Speaking Practice Experience	Digital Platform Used
P4	8th Semester	Online Speaking Buddy	YouTube, ELSA Speak
P5	8th Semester	Foreign Interlocutor Practice	WhatsApp, YouTube

Table 1 demonstrates that the participants had diverse experiences in speaking practices involving both direct interaction and technology-assisted communication. The participants also utilized various digital platforms to support their speaking development, including WhatsApp, YouTube, Zoom, Google Meet, and ELSA Speak. These different learning experiences allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive insights into how interlocutors and technological support systems contributed to students' speaking skill development.

Data collection in this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews and forum group discussion. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method because they provide flexibility for participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and opinions in detail while still allowing the researcher to maintain focus on the research objectives. Through interviews, participants were encouraged to explain their experiences regarding interaction with interlocutors, the use of digital technologies, classroom speaking activities, feedback practices, and challenges encountered during speaking development. Paterson (2022) explained that reflective interview practices help researchers uncover learners' metacognitive awareness and speaking improvement processes in EFL contexts. Similarly, Handayani (2024) utilized interviews to explore students' perceptions of online interaction with foreign interlocutors and found that interviews generated rich descriptions of learners' communicative experiences. The interview protocol in this study consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to provide detailed responses concerning their speaking practices and learning experiences.

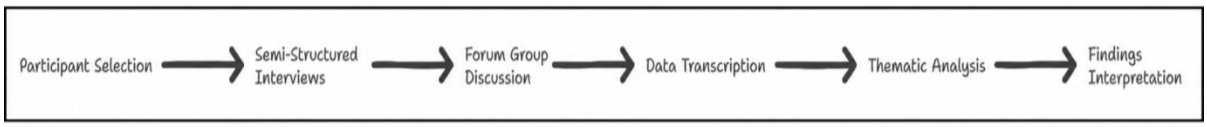

Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

Figure 1 illustrates the overall research procedure employed in this study, beginning from participant selection and continuing through interviews, forum group discussion, data coding, thematic analysis, and interpretation of findings. The procedure was designed systematically to ensure that the collected data accurately represented participants' experiences regarding speaking development, interlocutor interaction, and technological support systems.

In addition to interviews, forum group discussions were conducted to support and strengthen the interview findings. discussions enabled the researcher to directly examine speaking interaction, classroom participation, feedback practices, and communication dynamics among students. Liubashenko and Kornieva (2019) explained that forum group discussion is useful in speaking research because it allows researchers to capture authentic interactional behaviors and communication processes in real learning environments. forum group discussions in this study focused on how students interacted with classmates and interlocuters during speaking activities, how feedback was delivered, and how technological tools were integrated into classroom speaking practices. Furthermore, forum group

discussions also provided contextual understanding regarding students' engagement, and communicative participation during speaking tasks.

The data obtained from interviews and forum group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected because it is a flexible and systematic qualitative analysis method that allows researchers to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within qualitative data. The analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis procedure, which includes data familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Byrne (2021) explained that reflexive thematic analysis enables researchers to construct meaningful interpretations of participants' experiences while maintaining analytical transparency throughout the research process. In the initial stage, the researcher repeatedly read interview transcripts and forum group discussion notes to gain comprehensive understanding of the data. After familiarization, meaningful statements and segments related to speaking development, interlocutor interaction, and technological support systems were coded systematically. The codes were then categorized into broader themes that represented recurring patterns found across participants' experiences.

Table 2. Coding and Theme Development

Initial Codes	Categories	Themes
Nervous when speaking English	Speaking anxiety	Challenges in Speaking Development
Lack of vocabulary	Linguistic barriers	Challenges in Speaking Development
Peer discussion activities	Collaborative learning	Interlocutor Engagement
Practice with speakers	Authentic communication exposure	Interlocutor Engagement
Use of WhatsApp voice notes	Digital speaking practice	Technological Support Systems
Watching YouTube speaking videos	Pronunciation and fluency improvement	Technological Support Systems
Repeated pronunciation practice in ELSA Speak	Self-monitoring and feedback	Technological Support Systems

Table 2 presents the coding and theme development process conducted during thematic analysis. The themes were generated through repeated coding, categorization, and interpretation of participants' interview responses and forum group discussion findings. These themes represent the major patterns identified in the data regarding interlocutor interaction, technological support systems, and challenges encountered by students during speaking development.

The thematic analysis focused particularly on several major aspects related to speaking development. First, the analysis explored interlocutor engagement as a factor influencing speaking fluency, confidence, and communicative interaction. This aspect examined how communication with classmates, lecturers, and online speaking partners contributed to learners' speaking practices and interactional competence. Nagle et al. (2022) emphasized that interlocutor interaction significantly affects speaking comprehensibility and communicative performance in interactive contexts. Second, the analysis investigated the role of technological support systems, including digital applications, online platforms, classroom feedback, and technology-assisted learning activities, in supporting students' speaking improvement. Saed et al. (2021) highlighted that technological media such as YouTube provide authentic language exposure and increase students' speaking motivation in EFL

learning environments. Phạm and Nguyen (2022) also found that technology-supported speaking instruction positively influences students' speaking confidence and communicative participation. Finally, the analysis examined challenges encountered by students during speaking development, including anxiety, limited opportunities for authentic communication, lack of feedback, and technological limitations.

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, several validation strategies were implemented throughout the research process. First, triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from interviews, forum group discussions, and relevant literature to strengthen data consistency and credibility. Second, member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review interview summaries and interpretations to ensure that their perspectives were represented accurately. Third, peer debriefing sessions were carried out with academic colleagues to discuss emerging findings and analytical interpretations critically. These validation procedures were important to minimize researcher bias and increase the reliability of the study findings. Furthermore, ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the study before data collection began, and their voluntary consent was obtained prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were also protected by removing participants' identities from transcripts and research reports. All collected data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. The researcher additionally ensured that participants did not experience emotional discomfort during interviews or forum group discussions and respected their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Reflexivity was continuously maintained throughout the research process to enhance analytical transparency and self-awareness. The researcher acknowledged that personal perspectives, academic background, and prior experiences in English language learning could potentially influence data interpretation. Therefore, reflective notes and journals were used during data collection and analysis to critically examine how the researcher's assumptions and positionality shaped the research process. Byrne (2021) argued that reflexivity is essential in qualitative thematic analysis because it enables researchers to remain critically aware of their interpretative role in constructing findings. Through reflective practices, this study attempted to maintain balanced interpretation and ensure that the findings genuinely represented participants' experiences regarding speaking development, interlocutor interaction, and technological support systems.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

The findings of this study revealed that the development of speaking skills among five English department students at IAIN Langsa was significantly influenced by the interaction between interlocutors and technological support systems. Based on the interview data, the participants perceived speaking development not merely as a linguistic process but also as a psychological and interactional experience shaped by communication exposure, supportive learning environments, and continuous speaking practice. The findings indicated that students who actively participated in communicative interactions through classroom discussions, peer collaboration, online speaking activities, and technology-assisted learning platforms demonstrated higher speaking confidence and stronger willingness to communicate in English. Although the participants came from different academic backgrounds and possessed basic-level English proficiency, they shared similar experiences in facing speaking

difficulties such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, grammatical inaccuracies, and lack of confidence. However, the presence of supportive interlocutors and accessible technological tools helped them gradually improve their speaking performance and engagement in English communication activities.

Table 3. Major Findings of the Study

Theme	Main Findings	Supporting Evidence
Interlocutor Interaction	Students became more confident through communicative interaction	Peer discussion, online conversation practice and Role-Play Activities
Technology Support Systems	Technology increased autonomous speaking practice	WhatsApp, YouTube, ELSA Speak
Speaking Challenges	Anxiety and limited practice opportunities remained obstacles	Fear of mistakes and lack of speaking partners

Table 3 presents the major findings identified from interview and forum group discussion. The findings indicate that speaking development was shaped by communicative interaction, technology-supported learning practices, and collaborative speaking environments. However, several psychological and environmental challenges remained evident throughout the speaking development process.

4.1.1. Interlocutor Interaction and Speaking Skill Development

The interview findings revealed that interaction with classmates, online speaking partners, and interlocutors significantly contributed to students' speaking fluency. Most participants explained that regular communicative interaction gradually reduced their fear of making mistakes and encouraged them to speak more spontaneously. Students perceived communicative interaction as more beneficial than memorization-oriented speaking practice because interaction required immediate responses and meaning negotiation during conversations.

Participant 1 stated, *"When I practiced speaking with partners, I became more confident because they focused on communication rather than grammatical mistakes."* Similarly, Participant 2 explained, *"Classroom discussion activities helped me respond more spontaneously because I had to interact directly without preparing full sentences."* Participant 3 stated, *"At first, I struggled to understand different accents during online speaking sessions, but after practicing several times, I became more adaptable and confident in responding."*

Forum group discussion findings further strengthened these results. During classroom discussions, several students initially hesitated before responding to spontaneous questions. Nevertheless, after extended peer interaction, students became more willing to maintain conversations and express opinions without relying heavily on written preparation. The forum group discussion additionally showed that collaborative speaking activities created a lower-pressure atmosphere that encouraged greater communicative participation.

4.1.2. Role-Play and Discussion-Based Speaking Activities

The findings demonstrated that role-play and discussion-based speaking activities significantly improved students' spontaneity and conversational responsiveness. Participants explained that role-play activities trained them to continue conversations naturally without depending on memorized scripts, fostering a more organic and adaptive mode of spoken communication.

Participant 1 stated, *"When I practiced speaking with partners, I became more confident because they focused on communication rather than grammatical mistakes."* Similarly, Participant 2 explained, *"Group discussion activities helped me respond more spontaneously because I had to interact directly without preparing full sentences."* Participant 3 stated, *"At first, I struggled to understand different accents during online speaking sessions, but after practicing several times, I became more adaptable and confident in responding."* Furthermore, participant 4 explained, *"Role-play activities helped me speak more naturally because I had to continue the conversation directly with my partner."* Participant 5 also stated, *"Group discussions trained me to express opinions quickly even when I was not fully prepared."*

These results indicate that structured communicative activities compelled students to engage in immediate language production, gradually diminishing their reliance on pre-formulated responses. Beyond fluency improvement, communicative adaptability emerged as an equally salient dimension of speaking development. Students were not only learning to produce fluent speech but also acquiring the capacity to negotiate meaning, manage communication breakdowns, and sustain conversational continuity across diverse interactional contexts. forum group discussion findings corroborated these results, revealing that collaborative speaking activities engendered a lower-pressure communicative atmosphere that visibly encouraged greater participation and reduced hesitancy among students who had previously been reticent in spontaneous speaking situations.

Furthermore, the interview data revealed that repeated engagement in role-play and discussion activities gradually shifted students' orientation from grammatical accuracy toward communicative effectiveness, enabling them to express ideas more fluidly during interaction. Students perceived these activities as more beneficial than memorization-oriented practice precisely because they necessitated immediate responses and meaning negotiation, mirroring the demands of authentic real-world communication. This finding extends previous understandings of speaking development by demonstrating that contemporary EFL communication increasingly transpires within hybrid interactional environments that combine classroom-based and technology-mediated communicative experiences.

These findings support Ishak and Aziz (2022) argument that role-play creates authentic communicative conditions that improve communication competence and speaking confidence. Similarly, Sukmara et al. (2025) emphasized that role-play activities significantly improve classroom participation and communicative fluency through repeated interactional exposure. Nevertheless, the present study further reveals that communicative adaptability emerged as an equally important dimension of speaking development. Students were not only learning how to produce fluent speech but also learning how to negotiate meaning, manage communication breakdowns, and maintain conversational continuity with different interlocutors. This aspect is often underexplored in previous speaking studies focusing primarily on fluency improvement.

4.1.3. Technology-Assisted Speaking Practice

In addition to interpersonal interaction, technology-supported learning systems became important facilitators of autonomous speaking practice. Most participants reported using WhatsApp, YouTube, and speaking applications to improve pronunciation, fluency, and communication confidence outside classroom interaction.

Participant 2 stated, *"I often use WhatsApp voice notes because I can repeat my speaking practice before sending it."* Meanwhile, Participant 3 explained, *"ELSA Speak helps me identify pronunciation mistakes immediately."*

The evidence highlights that technology-supported learning environments provided students with flexible and psychologically safer spaces for repeated speaking practice. Students explained that asynchronous speaking activities such as voice-note recording reduced communication anxiety because they were able to evaluate and repeat their speaking performance independently before engaging in real interaction.

Forum group discussion findings additionally revealed that several students frequently practiced pronunciation independently using mobile devices before participating in speaking activities. This behavior suggests that technology functioned not only as a learning medium but also as a preparatory support mechanism that increased students' communicative confidence before real interaction occurred.

The interviews further revealed that YouTube became one of the most influential sources of authentic language exposure. Students explained that video-based learning activities helped them imitate pronunciation, intonation, and conversational expressions used by native speakers. Participant 1 stated, *"I usually imitate native speakers from YouTube videos to practice pronunciation and intonation."*

The data therefore indicate that authentic digital exposure contributes significantly to pronunciation awareness and communicative familiarity. Students gradually became more comfortable with natural speaking patterns through continuous listening and imitation activities. Furthermore, speaking applications contributed significantly to pronunciation awareness and autonomous speaking development. Participant 5 stated, *"Speaking applications immediately show my pronunciation errors, so I know what I need to improve."*

These findings reinforce Chen et al. (2024) argument that speaking systems improve students' speaking performance through interactive feedback and simulated communication activities. Likewise, Zou et al. (2023) explained that technology interaction increases learner engagement and communication exposure during speaking practice. In addition, Hou and Min (2025) emphasized that dialogue-based computer-assisted language learning systems effectively support second-language speaking development when integrated with authentic communicative interaction.

However, the findings also challenge overly technology-centered assumptions regarding speaking development. Although participants acknowledged the usefulness of technical speaking applications, they consistently perceived authentic interpersonal interaction as more difficult and ultimately more beneficial for communicative competence development. Participant 4 explained, *"Applications help my pronunciation, but real conversations with people are still more difficult and more useful."*

Unlike application interaction systems that provide relatively predictable communication patterns, authentic communication required spontaneous responses, emotional engagement, and negotiation of meaning. This indicates that technology-assisted learning systems function more effectively as complementary support mechanisms rather than substitutes for authentic communicative interaction.

4.1.4. Psychological Barriers and Challenges

Another important finding concerns the persistence of psychological barriers during speaking activities. Several participants explained that nervousness frequently caused them to forget vocabulary and hesitate during spontaneous communication. Participant 1 stated, *"Sometimes I know what I want to say, but I suddenly forget vocabulary because I become nervous."*

Forum group discussion findings also revealed that several students paused frequently during spontaneous speaking tasks despite demonstrating adequate vocabulary preparation beforehand. These results indicate that speaking anxiety continues to influence communicative performance even when students possess sufficient linguistic knowledge.

Additionally, participants reported difficulties maintaining consistent speaking practice outside classroom environments. Participant 3 explained, *"Outside the classroom, it is sometimes difficult to find people to practice speaking with consistently."* Similarly, Participant 5 stated, *"I often feel motivated at the beginning, but it becomes difficult to practice consistently without friends encouraging me."*

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Interlocutor Interaction and Communicative Adaptability

The interview data imply that speaking fluency developed more effectively when learners were exposed to authentic communicative situations rather than isolated language exercises. Students gradually shifted their focus from grammatical perfection toward communicative effectiveness, enabling them to express ideas more naturally during interaction. These results demonstrate that speaking development involves emotional readiness and interactional adaptability in addition to linguistic competence. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that speaking skills develop through continuous communicative practice and active learner participation in speaking activities (Dilnoza, 2021). Similarly, Patwary and Chowdhury (2021) argued that classroom interaction strengthens students' speaking fluency and encourages communicative participation through collaborative learning processes.

However, unlike previous studies that mainly focused on classroom-based interaction, the present study found that online interlocutors also contributed significantly to communicative adaptability and interactional flexibility. These results indicate that students developed communicative flexibility by adjusting pronunciation clarity, vocabulary selection, and speaking pace according to interactional contexts. This finding extends previous understandings of speaking development by demonstrating that contemporary EFL communication increasingly occurs within hybrid interactional environments combining classroom interaction and technology-mediated communication.

4.2.2. Role-Play as a Communicative Development Tool

The findings pertaining to role-play and discussion-based activities corroborate a substantial body of literature affirming the efficacy of structured communicative tasks in fostering spoken language development. The observed shift from grammatical preoccupation toward communicative effectiveness among participants is consistent with Ishak and Aziz's (2022) contention that role-play creates authentic communicative conditions that enhance communication competence and speaking skill, as learners are compelled to prioritize meaning conveyance over formal accuracy. Similarly, Sukmara et al. (2025) emphasized that role-play activities significantly improve classroom participation and communicative fluency through repeated interactional exposure, a pattern clearly discernible in the present study's findings.

Of particular significance is the emergence of communicative adaptability as a central outcome of role-play engagement. Unlike prior studies that have predominantly concentrated on fluency and accuracy as the primary indices of speaking development, the present study reveals that students simultaneously developed the capacity to negotiate meaning, manage communication breakdowns, and sustain conversational continuity across varied interactional contexts. This multidimensional conception of speaking competence aligns with Long's (1996)

interactionist hypothesis, which posits that meaning negotiation during communicative exchange constitutes a fundamental mechanism of language development. Role-play activities, by simulating authentic communicative scenarios, effectively positioned students as active meaning-makers rather than passive language reproducers.

Furthermore, the forum group that discussion-based activities reduced students' dependence on memorized scripts suggests that communicative tasks with an element of unpredictability are particularly conducive to spontaneous language production. This finding resonates with Peltonen (2022) argument that collaborative speaking interaction encourages learners to resolve communicative challenges jointly, thereby cultivating interactional competence that extends beyond the mere reproduction of pre-learned linguistic forms. Collectively, these results underscore that role-play and discussion-based activities represent indispensable pedagogical instruments for developing the communicative flexibility and adaptive speaking competence increasingly demanded in contemporary hybrid EFL communication environments.

4.2.3. Technology as a Complementary Support Mechanism

The evidence highlights that technology-supported learning environments provided students with flexible and psychologically safer spaces for repeated speaking practice. Students explained that asynchronous speaking activities such as voice-note recording reduced communication anxiety because they were able to evaluate and repeat their speaking performance independently before engaging in real interaction. This finding aligns with Nguyen and Pham (2022), who reported that technology-enhanced learning environments increase speaking opportunities and reduce communication anxiety among EFL learners. Similarly, Asratie et al. (2023) emphasized that educational technology tools positively contribute to speaking fluency through repeated exposure and immediate feedback mechanisms.

These findings reinforce Chen et al. (2024) argument that technology-assisted speaking systems improve students' speaking performance through interactive feedback and simulated communication activities. Likewise, Zou et al. (2023) explained that technology-assisted interaction increases learner engagement and communication exposure during speaking practice. However, the findings also challenge overly technology-centered assumptions regarding speaking development. Although participants acknowledged the usefulness of technology-assisted speaking applications, they consistently perceived authentic interpersonal interaction as more difficult and ultimately more beneficial for communicative competence development.

4.2.4. Psychological Barriers and Sustainable Speaking Communities

The data imply that speaking development requires sustainable interactional ecosystems rather than isolated individual practice. Autonomous learning alone was insufficient to maintain long-term communicative engagement without collaborative speaking communities and continuous interactional support. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that speaking instruction should move beyond grammar-oriented classroom practices and prioritize interaction-rich learning environments that encourage spontaneous communication and collaborative speaking activities. Institutions should also facilitate sustainable English-speaking communities, online speaking partnerships, and interaction-based extracurricular activities to provide continuous communicative exposure beyond formal classroom interaction.

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of speaking development within a hybrid communicative learning environment integrating interlocutor interaction and technology-

assisted speaking systems in the context of Islamic higher education. Unlike previous studies that examined classroom interaction and educational technology separately, the present study demonstrates how interpersonal communication, autonomous speaking practice, and technology-supported learning collectively shape students' speaking development processes in contemporary EFL contexts. This study has several limitations. First, the research involved only five participants from one higher education institution, limiting broader contextual generalization. Second, the study relied primarily on qualitative interview and forum group discussion without incorporating quantitative speaking performance measurements. Third, the study focused mainly on students' perceptions of speaking development rather than longitudinal communicative achievement. Future studies are recommended to investigate the long-term integration of technology-assisted learning systems and interaction-based speaking instruction using broader participant populations and mixed-method approaches.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the development of speaking skills among EFL learners is strongly influenced by the integration of interlocutor interaction and technological support systems within hybrid communicative learning environments. The findings reveal that communicative interaction with classmates, online speaking partners, and interlocutors contributes significantly to students' speaking fluency, spontaneity, and communicative adaptability. Through authentic interaction, students become more capable of negotiating meaning, responding spontaneously, and maintaining conversational continuity in diverse communication contexts. In addition, technology-assisted learning platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, and ELSA Speak provide flexible opportunities for autonomous speaking practice, pronunciation improvement, and self-monitoring through repeated exposure and continuous practice.

The study further indicates that technological support systems function most effectively when they complement authentic interpersonal communication rather than replace it. Although digital tools facilitate independent practice and reduce communication anxiety, students still perceive real interaction as the most valuable component of speaking development because authentic communication requires adaptability and spontaneous language production. Furthermore, psychological barriers such as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities for continuous interaction remain significant challenges affecting speaking performance. Therefore, speaking development should be viewed not only as a linguistic achievement but also as an interactional and psychological process shaped by communicative exposure, collaborative learning environments, and sustainable speaking communities.

The findings contribute to EFL speaking studies by highlighting the importance of integrating interaction-based learning and technology-assisted speaking systems within higher education contexts, particularly in contemporary digital communication environments. This study also expands current understanding of speaking development by emphasizing communicative adaptability and hybrid interactional experiences as central components of speaking competence among university students. In terms of practical implications, EFL instructors are encouraged to design speaking tasks that foster authentic interlocutor interaction, whilst curriculum designers should embed technology-assisted platforms as structured syllabus components rather than peripheral tools. At the institutional level, investment in hybrid learning infrastructures that sustain speaking communities beyond the formal classroom is strongly recommended, alongside the incorporation of psychological

support mechanisms to cultivate a low-anxiety communicative environment conducive to speaking development.

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