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Utilization of Voki Application as an Interactive Media to Improve Speaking Skill of Ninth Grade Students in Junior High School

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims the effectiveness of the Voki application as an interactive digital media tool to improve the speaking skills of ninth-grade students in a junior high school in Indonesia. Many students face psychological barriers such as anxiety, low confidence, and fear of making mistakes, which hinder their speaking performance in English. By integrating Voki an online platform that allows students to create speaking avatars into four speaking lessons, this study explored how the application influenced students' confidence, motivation, and participation. The research employed a qualitative case study design and involved 30 students who completed a questionnaire and 10 students who participated in in-depth interviews. The questionnaire data, analyzed using descriptive statistics, revealed that the majority of students had positive perceptions of Voki, reporting increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and improved pronunciation and fluency. Interview results supported these findings, highlighting that features such as voice recording, avatar customization, and audio playback encouraged independent learning and reduced fear of speaking. The findings align with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, indicating that emotionally safe and multimodal environments foster better speaking performance. Overall, this study demonstrates that Voki is an effective, accessible, and engaging tool for enhancing speaking skills and offers practical implications for integrating digital tools into English language instruction.

Keywords: *Speaking Skills,Voki*

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INTRODUCTION

In English language learning, speaking remains one of the most difficult skills for students to master. Based on the research observation, many ninth grade students in junior high schools face difficulties in speaking English due to psychological barriers such as anxiety, low self confidence, and fear of making mistakes. These psychological factors significantly reduce their willingness to engage in classroom speaking activities. According to (Putri & Nimasari, 2021), speaking anxiety is a major factor that negatively affects students' ability to perform in English speaking tasks, especially in formal classroom settings. The challenge lies in the traditional teaching methods that still dominate English language classrooms. Teachers often focus on textbook-based instruction and written tasks, leaving minimal room for interactive speaking practice. As a result, students do not have enough opportunities to express themselves orally in meaningful and engaging ways. (Rahmah et al., 2022) argue that monotonous teaching practices and limited interaction in the classroom contribute to students' lack of motivation in speaking. In the context of Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language, and students often do not have exposure to English outside the classroom. Therefore, the classroom becomes the only place for them to practice speaking.

During a preliminary classroom observation, the researcher identified a specific issue : students showed low motivation and engagement during speaking activities. Many students were reluctant to speak, and classroom speaking tasks were perceived as intimidating and

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boring. This lack of motivation is a critical factor that affects students' speaking progress, as motivation is closely linked to participation and confidence in language learning (Hasibuan & Simanjuntak, 2023). These human and instructional problems are interconnected with how English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, where students often have limited exposure to real-world English usage outside the classroom. Thus, the classroom must serve as a dynamic and supportive environment for speaking practice. To address these challenges, the use of interactive digital tools can be a promising solution. In this study, the VOKI application was integrated into speaking instruction over a period of four classroom sessions to allow students to engage in repeated practice and familiarity with the tool. One such tool is VOKI, an online platform that allows students to create animated avatars and record spoken messages. This technology provides a low-pressure, creative space for students to express themselves without fear of being judged directly. This aligns with (Harahap & Wahyuni, 2021), who found that digital avatars reduce student anxiety by providing emotional distance (Nasution & Lubis, 2020) found that VOKI helps reduce speaking anxiety and increases student motivation by combining visual and auditory stimulation with digital storytelling. By integrating VOKI into speaking activities, teachers can promote a more engaging, student centered approach. This instructional strategy aligns with established language learning theories, such as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which emphasize the role of emotional comfort and multimodal learning in second language acquisition. (Sutrisno & Permata, 2021) also found that students responded positively to VOKI due to its interactive and user-friendly features that supports emotional well-being and improves speaking competence.

Speaking is considered one of the most essential yet challenging skills in English language learning. It requires learners to combine various elements such as vocabulary, grammar, pronounciation, fluency, and confidence. According to Brown (2007), "speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information," and should therefore be thought through communicative, student-centered approaches. In this regard, the integration of digital tools such as VOKI supports the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework by enabling interactive speaking practice. VOKI, as a digital speaking platform, aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasizes that emotional barriers like anxiety and low confidence can hinder language acquisition, and that reducing these factors can improve learning. By allowing students to rehearse and express themselves through avatars. (Lestari & Manullang, 2023) also showed that animated character based tools can increase student motivation and reduce classroom speaking inhibition, VOKI helps lower anxiety and increase motivation. Additionally, Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning supports the idea that students learn more effectively through the combination of words and images, making multimedia tools like VOKI particularly effective in promoting-speaking skills through dual-channel processing.

Previous studies have explored the use of VOKI to improve students' speaking skills, but most of them were conducted at different educational levels. For example, (Ramdani, 2018) focused on 7th grade students at SMPN 4 Tambun Selatan, while (Manty et al., 2017) studied the impact of VOKI on elementary school students in Turkey. However, there is a lack of studies focusing specifically on ninth grade students, who are at a critical transition stage and face increased academic pressure and expectations, which can affect their motivation and performance in speaking English. To date, no research has been conducted at MTs, regarding the integration of VOKI in English speaking instruction. Since the school represents a unique local context with its own institutional culture and student background, this study is expected to contribute practical insights relevant to similar Islamic junior high schools in Indonesia. Most previous research, such as that by Nasution and Lubis (2020), highlighted Voki's practical benefits in reducing speaking anxiety and enhancing student engagement. However, few studies have deeply examined the theoretical connection between digital media like VOKI and theories of motivation and language acquisition, such as Gardner's socio educational model or Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. This study attempts to bridge that theoretical

gap by analyzing how VOKI supports not only skill development but also emotional readiness and motivation to speak.

In today's digital era, learning applications are not only supplementary tools but have also become crucial in enhancing student engagement and fostering independent learning. One such application that supports the development of speaking skills through interactive media is the VOKI Application (https://www.voki.com/). This application is specifically designed to provide learners with opportunities to practice speaking by creating personalized avatars that can be programmed to speak the text provided by students. Interactive features such as customizable characters, voice recording, and avatar presentations encourage students to actively participate in speaking activities, reduce speaking anxiety, and increase motivation in language learning.

This study is significant both academically and practically. Academically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on the use of interactive digital media in English language teaching, particularly for enhancing speaking skills. It also offers a contextualized examination of VOKI at the ninth-grade level in an Indonesian Islamic school setting, which has not been widely studied before. Practically, it provides teachers with a concrete example of how technology can be integrated into language teaching to support student motivation, reduce anxiety, and create a more engaging learning environment. Therefore this study are expected to benefit English teachers, curriculum designers, and education policymakers who aim to improve speaking instruction through the use of technology based tools like VOKI. Research Objectives and Methodology to address this question, this study aims to Investigate the effectiveness of using the VOKI application in improving the speaking skills of ninth-grade students at MTs, Examine how the use of VOKI affects students' motivation and anxiety during speaking activities, Provide recommendations for English language teachers on integrating interactive digital media in speaking instruction. Although several studies have reported the benefits of using VOKI in developing speaking skills, there is still a lack of research that explores how students' perceptions shift and develop as they consistently engage with the application in various classroom settings. Most prior research has focused on short-term implementation or on different education levels, leaving a gap in understanding how digital media like VOKI supports emotional, motivational, and linguistic development among ninth-grade EFL students.Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its investigation of how the VOKI application impacts students' speaking skills from a multidimensional perspective focusing not only on language output but also on psychological factors such as confidence, motivation, and participation. By employing a qualitative case study design, this research seeks to provide an in depth view of how VOKI contributes to students' learning experiences, particularly in a real world classroom context. To guide this study, the research questions were formulated How do ninth-grade students perceive the use of the VOKI application as a digital learning tool to improve their speaking skills?

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method to investigate students' perceptions of the VOKI application as an interactive tool to improve English speaking skills among ninth-grade students. The qualitative descriptive design was chosen because it allows the researcher to present a comprehensive summary of participants' experiences in their own words without the need for complex interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000). This approach is suitable for exploring real life classroom contexts where technology integration influences language learning. The study was conducted at MTs, a junior high school located in Medan, Indonesia. The school was selected due to its accessibility and its willingness to incorporate educational technology into classroom instruction. The participants were 30 nint-grade students (17 female and 13 male students) were selected through purposive sampling. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), is a common strategy in qualitative research used to select participants who have specific characteristics relevant to the study objectives. In this case, the selected students were actively participating in English speaking activities and had access to internet-enabled devices.

Permission to conduct the study and to use the VOKI application in the classroom was granted by the school administration and the student's English teacher. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the researcher ensured anonymity and confidentiality in line with ethical research standards (Creswell, 2013). Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process, consistent with the ethical standards outlined bty Creswell (2013).

The open-ended questionnaire was designed to explore students' experiences in using the VOKI application, particularly in relation to frequency of use,accessibility, preferred features, and the application's impact on speaking confidence, fluency, and vocabulary acquisition. The questionnaire responses were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. To complement the questionnaire findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten selected students who represented a diverse range og speaking abilities and classroom participation levels. The interviews, conducted both in person and via WhatsApp messaging, aimed to gain deeper insights into the students' experiences. The interview questions focused on four key areas is the frequency of application use, ease of access, most appreciated features, and the perceived impact on students' speaking performance and confidence. During the interviews, the researcher created a relaxed and supportive atmosphere to encourage honest and open responses (Brinkmmann & Kvale, 2015). To ensure the reliability of the findings, the questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 5 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree) (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015). The instrument consisted of ten items designed to explore students' perceptions of the VOKI application, focusing on aspects such as frequency of use, ease of access, preferred features, and its impact on speaking confidence, fluency, vocabulary development, and anxiety reduction. Sample statements included "Voki helps me feel more confident when speaking English" and "I learn new vocabulary through VOKI." This scale allowed for the systematic collection of measurable quantitative data (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). In addition, to gain deeper qualitative insights, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected students. These participants represented a range of speaking abilities and classroom participation levels to ensure diverse perspectives (Palinkas et al., 2015).

This study used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. The quantitative data, obtained from the questionnaire responses, were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine general patterns in students' perceptions and usage of the VOKI application. This analysis provided measurable data regarding how frequently students used the app, how accessible they found it, and how much they felt it contributed to their speaking development. The responses were categorized and presented in percentages to reflect the degree of impact perceived by the students. Meanwhile, the qualitative data derived from the interviews, were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher transcribed all interviews and systematically coded them to identify recurring themes such as increased motivation, reduced speaking anxiety, improved fluency, and technical challenges. The thematic analysis allowed the researcher to interpret not only the surface responses but also the underlying meaning and emotions conveyed by the participants. This method ensured a rich, in-depth understanding of students' experiences and perspectives on using VOKI in their English-speaking development. By combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the researcher was able to triangulate the findings, thus enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This comprehensive analysis offered valuable insights into the role of VOKI as an interactive learning tool in improving students' speaking skills and provided practical suggestions for educators and developers aiming to integrate digital tools into language instruction.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined ninth-grade students' perceptions of the VOKI application as an interactive digital learning tool to improve English speaking skills. The results are organized

thematically to address cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspectives, integrating both quantitative and qualitative findings. Data were obtained from a Likert-scale questionnaire completed by 30 students and semi-structured interviews with selected participants. The questionnaire contained 15 items, grouped into four thematic categories: speaking confidence, speaking anxiety, speaking enjoyment, and supportive features of VOKI.

Table 1 presents the percentage of students who selected strongly agree or agree for each thematic category.

No	Themes	Numbers Statement	Presentation of Agree
1	Increased speaking confidence	1,3,5,7,9	65 %
2	Reduced speaking anxiety	2,4,8	63 %
3	Speaking activities become more enjoyable	6,10,12,13	61 %
4	Supportive and engaging features	11,14,15	58 %

Increased Speaking Confidence

This theme emerged from Items 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9. Across these statements, students consistently reported higher self-assurance in speaking English after using VOKI. For example, in Item 1, 65% of students agreed that VOKI increased their willingness to speak English in front of others. In Item 5, 68% stated that the ability to record and replay their voice allowed them to refine their speaking performance before sharing with peers. One student remarked: "I am more confident speaking English when I use VOKI because I can practice several times before showing it to my friends."

These findings suggest that VOKI's recording and replay functions reduce the psychological pressure of real-time speaking, enabling students to rehearse and self-monitor. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis and is supported by recent evidence from Zhang and Zou (2021), who found that digital speaking tools enhance learner confidence by providing a safe, low-stress practice environment.

Reduced Speaking Anxiety

Statements 2, 4, and 8 indicated that VOKI effectively reduced learners' speaking anxiety. In Item 8, 67% agreed they felt less stressed when their speaking tasks were presented via an avatar instead of face-to-face. A student explained: "It's easier to talk using VOKI because my friends are looking at the avatar, not me, so I'm not so nervous."

This reduction in performance anxiety can be attributed to the psychological distance created by the avatar, which diverts direct attention away from the speaker. These results are consistent with studies by Chien et al. (2020), highlighting that avatar-based learning environments can lower anxiety and promote more active participation in speaking tasks.

Speaking Activities Become More Enjoyable

Items 6, 10, 12, and 13 revealed that students found speaking activities with VOKI more enjoyable compared to traditional oral presentations. In Item 10, 65% agreed that creating and animating avatars was entertaining, while Item 13 showed that 60% valued the creative element of designing their own avatars. As one student noted: "Using VOKI feels like playing a game while learning, so it's not boring." (R3)

Such engagement reflects the principles of gamification in education, where enjoyment fosters intrinsic motivation (Setiawan & Wiedarti, 2020). Recent findings by Yildiz and Kose (2022) also confirm that gamified digital tools sustain learner interest and encourage repeated practice in speaking activities.

Supportive and Engaging Features

The final theme was derived from Items 11, 14, and 15. In Item 11, 62% agreed that VOKI's features helped them organize their speech better, while Item 14 (56%) highlighted the value of saving and reviewing past recordings. A student shared: "I like choosing the character and voice; it makes my speaking feel more unique and personal."

These features offer creative control and personalization, fostering a sense of ownership over the learning process. This finding aligns with Oura and Oura (2023), who note that personalization in digital learning environments increases student engagement and improves language production quality.

Discussions

The findings of this study indicate that students generally had a positive perception of the VOKI application as a tool to improve their English-speaking skills. Students expressed enjoyment in using VOKI due to its interactive features, particularly the use of avatars and voice customization. This level of engagement and interest aligns with Mayer's (2001) Multimedia Learning Theory, which posits that students learn better from words and pictures than from words alone. The visual and auditory components of VOKI created a dynamic learning environment that made students feel more motivated and less pressured, which was repeatedly expressed during interviews and confirmed in the questionnaire responses. This positive response also supports the idea that technology can play an important role in increasing students' willingness to participate in speaking activities, especially in contexts where speaking English is often seen as intimidating. The results showed that students experienced a significant reduction in speaking anxiety when using the VOKI application. This finding confirms the theory proposed by Putri & Nimasari (2020), who stated that speaking anxiety is one of the most significant barriers in EFL classrooms. Interviews in this study revealed that many students previously felt nervous or afraid of making mistakes during oral English tasks, but with the presence of avatars and the opportunity to record privately, they felt safer and more confident. This reflects Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which explains that a low anxiety environment facilitates language acquisition by lowering the "filter" that can block input. The ability to practice speaking privately, repeat recordings, and not be immediately judged by peers created an environment where students could experiment and improve their speech without fear, effectively lowering their affective filter. The findings of this study are in line with the research by Nasution & Lubis (2022), who found that application-based speaking instruction increases students' learning motivation. Students in the current study expressed enthusiasm in completing speaking tasks through VOKI and showed more initiative to practice outside the classroom. This motivational boost is essential in language learning, as motivation drives consistency and effort, both of which are crucial in developing speaking fluency. In terms of previous studies, this research also shows similar results to Ramdani (2018), who concluded that VOKI effectively improved speaking performance among 7th-grade students. However, while Ramdani focused primarily on the improvement of fluency and pronunciation, the current study gives more emphasis to the emotional and motivational aspects, such as confidence, anxiety, and enjoyment. Therefore, while the findings are generally aligned, this study adds a new perspective by highlighting the affective benefits of the application in a 9th-grade setting. Despite these promising results, this study has certain limitations. The most notable limitation lies in the accessibility of the technology. While many students benefited from the use of the VOKI application, some participants reported difficulty using it outside of school due to limited internet access or lack of devices at home. This limits the full potential of independent learning that the application can offer. Moreover, the sample size was relatively small (30 students) and limited to one school, which may not represent the broader population of 9th-grade students in other regions or educational settings. Future research is encouraged to include a larger and more diverse sample and to examine how institutional or infrastructural support can help maximize the impact of digital tools like Voki.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the VOKI application as an interactive media tool to improve the speaking skills of ninth-grade students in a junior high school setting. It specifically explored how the integration of VOKI influenced students' confidence, motivation, and speaking anxiety during English speaking activities. The findings demonstrated that the use of VOKI had a significantly positive impact on students' speaking development. Students reported that the application helped them feel more confident when speaking English, reduced their anxiety, and increased their willingness to participate in speaking tasks. Additionally, many students found VOKI to be enjoyable and user-friendly,

which encouraged them to practice speaking both in and outside the classroom. The unique features of the application such as customizable avatars, voice recording, and audio playback contributed to creating a more engaging and supportive learning environment. The results of this study support several established theories in language learning. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) is confirmed by the reduction in speaking anxiety experienced by the students, as they were able to practice speaking in a low-pressure, virtual space. Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning is also supported, as the combination of visual and auditory elements in VOKI was shown to enhance students' engagement and learning outcomes. Moreover, the study aligns with the findings of Putri & Nimasari (2021), who emphasized that speaking anxiety is one of the major barriers in EFL classrooms, and with Nasution & Lubis (2020), who found that VOKI can increase student motivation and participation in speaking activities. Compared to Ramdani's (2018) study, which focused on seventh-grade students, this research expands on existing knowledge by focusing on ninth-grade learners, who face greater academic and emotional demands in their speaking tasks. These findings carry practical implications for language educators and curriculum developers. English teachers are encouraged to utilize interactive digital media like VOKI in their classrooms to foster a more engaging, emotionally safe, and student-centered approach to speaking instruction. The application can be used as a supplementary tool that not only enhances speaking competence but also builds students' confidence and motivation through creative and personalized practice. The VOKI application has proven to be an effective, accessible, and enjoyable tool for improving students' speaking performance in English. It promotes active learning, reduces psychological barriers, and encourages consistent practice. This study contributes valuable insights into the integration of digital media in EFL contexts and offers a foundation for future research on technology enhanced language instruction. Given its positive impact, further exploration of VOKI in various educational settings is recommended to maximize its potential and to continue advancing speaking instruction through innovative. This is in line with (Apriani & Fitriani, 2020), who emphasized the role of creative technology in enhancing speaking skills in ELT.

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