CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The English language has transformed into a global means of communication that impacts many sectors including education, business, and international relations (Wang and Wang 2020). In this age of globalization, the ability to speak English is important for every student at the global and national level. Unfortunately, in Indonesia, English proficiency, especially speaking skills, remains a major problem for students. This problem is common among students at the secondary school level, who are unable to foster their speaking skills because of insufficient self-esteem, inadequate exposure to real-world communication, poor instructional methods, and insufficient teaching methods (Shalehah & Rahmawati, 2025).

While conducting pre-research during my Field Experience Practice, or field experience teaching practicum, at Surya Harapan School (SHS), I noticed that 10th grade students were particularly challenged in speaking English. Even though the school policy encourages the use of English in classes, most students did not have the confidence to communicate in English. Furthermore, the absence of practice hampered their speaking progress. The students' struggles, such as anxiety about making mistakes and having low self-esteem, are typical in learning foreign languages, particularly in speaking skills (Islam & Stapa, 2021).

The traditional approaches to teaching the English language that focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary, have been known to adversely affect speaking skills in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). These approaches barely provide opportunity for authentic speaking practice that aids in the development of

fluency and confidence (Thornbury, 2005). Further, a lack of opportunities to use English in daily contexts poses challenges to students' fluency. Psychological aspects like anxiety or fear of making mistakes also greatly affect students' willingness to speak English during lessons (Roosdianna et al., 2018).

To overcome these barriers, it is important to implement teaching techniques that offer interactivity and hands-on experience to learners. The use of communicative methods of teaching, along with technology-based video assignments and digital storytelling, are known to enhance learner participation as well as the speaking performance of students (Laila et al., 2023). Of all technological innovations, the use of digital language learning apps has become popular because they offer students convenient and enjoyable methods to practice language skills.

An example of a widely utilized application in language learning is Duolingo. It targets reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills with gamified lessons to boost motivation and to foster engagement (Erlangga et al., 2019). Godwin (2021) explains that students can aid their own pronunciation by using Duolingo's voice recognition features, which enhances both their confidence and speaking accuracy. In addition, XP and levelling systems outlined in Ary (2010) create competition and engagement, encouraging further improvement to students' skills.

While prior works have noted the positive impact of Duolingo on students' speaking skills, there seem to be some research gaps considering how the app measures up with traditional approaches in formal school settings. As an example, Selaparang (2023) reported that students who used Duolingo demonstrated greater improvement in speaking fluency and vocabulary skills than their peers who

utilized more traditional approaches. Hafifah (2021) similarly reported that Duolingo can increase students' learning motivation and provide greater opportunities for them to speak in a more interactive, dynamic framework.

Considering these results, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of the Duolingo application on the speaking skills of 10th-grade students at Suria Harapan High School. It will use a pre-experimental framework with a one-group pretest-posttest design, assessing students' speaking skills through evaluation sessions held prior to and following the implementation of the Duolingo app. The study is anticipated to inform the formulation of more progressive English teaching methods in secondary schools and reveal optimal pathways for the integration of technology in language education.

The significance of this study is grounded both in the potential that Duolingo may have for enhancing speaking skills as well as the need to understand better how technology can be embedded in conventional language teaching and learning to equip learners prepare them to communicate in English effectively.

1.2. Problem Identification

Based on the background that has been explained, there are several problems that can be identified in this study, namely:

1. Lack of Effective and Interactive Exercises for Developing Speaking Skills: Many 10th-grade students at Suria Harapan High School struggle to develop their English-speaking skills due to insufficient exposure to effective and interactive speaking practice. During my Field Experience Practice last year, I observed that students were not provided with enough speaking practice opportunities. This lack of engagement hindered their

ability to improve, particularly during their first year at the school when they were still adjusting to the demands of learning English.

2. Ineffectiveness of Conventional Learning Methods: The conventional learning methods employed at Suria Harapan High School tend to focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary memorization, offering limited opportunities for students to practice speaking skills actively. These traditional methods often fail to engage students in authentic, real-life communication scenarios, which is crucial for developing fluency and confidence in speaking. Without ample speaking practice, students' speaking proficiency does not improve significantly.

3. Low Motivation and Confidence in Speaking Skills: Another significant issue identified is the lack of motivation and low confidence among students, particularly in speaking skills. Many students feel insecure about their ability to communicate in English, which leads to anxiety and reluctance to speak in class. This lack of a supportive and interactive learning environment contributes to their low motivation and makes it more difficult for them to actively engage in speaking practice, further hindering their progress in mastering the language.

1.3. Problem Limitation

In order to make this research more focused and directed, the problem boundaries used in this study are:

1. This study only focuses on the effectiveness of using the Duolingo application in improving the speaking skills of 10th-grade students at SMA Suria Harapan. The speaking skills to be analyzed in this study

include the following indicators: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension.

2. The research will specifically measure the impact of the Duolingo app on students' speaking skills, looking at how the app influences their ability to pronounce words correctly, speak fluently, use appropriate vocabulary, apply grammar correctly, and understand spoken English in real-time conversations.

1.4. Problem Formulation

Based on the identification and limitation of problems, the problem formulations in this study are:

1. Is there any significant effect of using the Duolingo application on the speaking skills of tenth-grade students at SMA Suria Harapan, particularly in addressing challenges like low student engagement and lack of speaking practice?

1.5. Research Objectives

This research aims to assess whether the use of the Duolingo application has an effect on the speaking skills of grade 10 students at Suria Harapan High School, particularly focusing on aspects such as pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension.

1.6. Research Benefits

1. Theoretical Benefits

The research is intended to advance the integration of technology in the teaching of speaking skills within English pedagogical practices. The results could reveal important information regarding the use of digital

applications such as Duolingo and their influence on language learning, which could inform future studies about the use of technology in language learning.

2. Practical Benefits

a. For Students: This research explores the potential of fostering a positive shift in students' motivational attitudes toward English, making the learning experience more enjoyable and interactive, thus enabling students to practice their speaking skills with greater frequency.

b. For Teachers: This study furnishes educators with an innovative and useful digital technology-based approach to teaching speaking English which addresses the problem of poor student participation and speaking activities at Suria Harapan High School. This could lead to improved educational outcomes and greater participation by students.

c. For Schools: This study can help schools intending to adopt technology-driven instruction to enhance the delivery and teaching of the English language. Use of Duolingo and similar software applications could promote greater ease and interactivity in learning the language.

d. For Other Researchers: The research offers an enhanced reference list for assessing the efficacy of app-based learning, particularly with regard to language learning applications such as Duolingo. It may assist in investigating the impact of technology on language acquisition and its use in the classroom.

1.7.   Definition of key terms

In order to avoid misunderstandings in understanding this research, some key terms used in this research are explained as follows:

1. Duolingo: A digital-based language learning app that uses a gamification approach to help users learn languages interactively.

2. Speaking Skills: A person's ability to express thoughts, ideas and feelings in spoken language using appropriate pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and fluency.

1.8.   Basic Assumptions

In this study, there are several basic assumptions used, namely:

1. The Duolingo app can help improve students' speaking skills by providing interactive exercises that cover various aspects of speaking. Given the issues observed at SMA Suria Harapan, where students lack engagement and speaking practice, Duolingo's gamified approach may offer a solution to these challenges.

2. Students who use Duolingo are more motivated to practice speaking because the app has gamification features that encourage user engagement.

3. Application-based learning methods have different effectiveness from conventional methods in improving students' speaking skills.

4. The use of technology in English language learning can have a positive impact on student learning outcomes by providing greater access to independent practice.