

## **INVESTIGATING NON-ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING PROFICIENCY AND THE USE OF TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract.** The rapid social development taking place in the last decades has been inextricably linked with the evolution of technology, which has had profound impacts on various sectors and services, especially education. The incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into daily pedagogical practices has emerged as a viable solution for innovating the educational system. In this context, a quantitative study was conducted to explore how non-English majors self-perceived their English-speaking proficiency and utilized technological tools for self-development. The study surveyed 1,036 out of 3,991 (27%) second-year students who were not English majors and were attending a public university in Vietnam. The data collection and analysis revealed that while the participants had positive self-perceptions towards English learning, they also acknowledged areas that need improvements in their English-speaking skill. The study also indicated that certain educational technological tools have been used by the participants to improve their English-speaking proficiency. The findings of the study underscored the importance of incorporating technological tools into language learning to promote more engagement and opportunities for practice. Additionally, the study emphasized the crucial role of teachers in promoting the use of technological advancements in various language learning environments.

**Keywords:** Self-perceptions, speaking skill, technological tools

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

It is remarked that technology has become an essential aspect of daily life for most human beings in recent years (Hatch, 2011). The social changes which have taken place in the last decades are directly associated with the evolution of technology, which has affected almost all sectors and services, especially education. Rashid & Asghar (2016) stated that over the last few decades, the incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into daily pedagogical practices has been viewed as a variable solution for the innovation of the educational system. The development of technology has recently provided affordances for language teaching and learning and major changes in language education have been made to get themselves compatible together. In this field, its positive impacts and benefits for teachers and learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) have been pointed out in various ways. For example, with technological advancements, learning materials and lesson availability have been easier to be accessed to in a more convenient and flexible way, no matter where students are. Besides that, the variety of technological devices and applications also make the learning process funnier and more enjoyable through interesting media. Eshankulovna (2021) stated that technology can enhance learners' playfulness and involve them in many ways. Technology gives learners a chance to engage independently, provides opportunities for self-paced interactions, privacy, and a safe environment where mistakes are corrected and exact feedback is given (Parveen, 2016). The language learning and teaching, additionally, are no longer limited to the classroom in their fixed time frames as the ubiquity of mobile devices has made it possible for these activities to take place without any time and spatial boundaries.

In terms of developing speaking skill, there have been insufficient opportunities for EFL students' verbal and aural practice due to factors such as a lack of English contexts, good spoken English examples, as well as heavy reliance on traditional teaching methods (Hwang et al., 2016). Technology, however, has been realized to supplement them with more learning contexts to improve this skill through many channels such as games, short English videos, films, online English language tutorials and mobile applications. For example, Almurashi (2016) stated YouTube is an interesting medium to use in teaching and learning English. YouTube provides many videos that can be used as the students' learning resources. Mobile

devices, on the other hand, have transformed the way in which students interact with peers, send and receive feedback, and engage in collaborative learning (Hwang et al., 2016; Xu & Peng, 2017). In addition, students can improve their speaking accuracy with many technological applications through the development of their grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation knowledge.

Regarding English language learning, speaking has become the measure of students' proficiency in the language they are learning (Glover, 2011). Yet, a number of issues, including low self-esteem, a lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and ineffective teaching methods, might limit students' capacity to talk. The advancements in information technology in this period may be the answer to those issues. Technology advancements appear to have a significant positive impact on education. Students can study through a range of engaging media thanks to technology (Kristiani & Pradnyadewi, 2021). They can improve their speaking accuracy with many different technological applications through the development of their grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation knowledge.

As for Vietnamese students, mobile assisted language learning (MALL) has also become very popular especially among students at higher educational institutions because of the availability of mobile devices such as mobile phones, personal computers (PCs) or tablets. Almost every student has one or more of these devices frequently connected to the Internet, which has also made it easier for them to make use of online applications to learn English. In order to find out Vietnamese students' self-perceptions of their English-speaking learning and their utilization of technological tools to improve their speaking skill, the study was carried out. The objective was to have a good understanding of non-English majors' general perceptions of their English learning, their speaking levels, their practice frequency and their expectations on areas of improvement. Besides, based on the students' self-perceptions of their English speaking skill, the study also aimed at finding out their current use of technological tools in their autonomous learning – how students have pathed their ways towards effective utilization of such tools to benefit themselves. Findings of the study provide a reference for teachers in designing teaching activities in which technological elements can be included to make the lessons more efficient and facilitate the improvement of students' English-speaking skill inside and outside the classroom. To achieve these aims, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are non-English majored students' perceptions of their English-speaking learning?
2. How have technological tools been used for self-development based on their perceptions?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Key concepts of the study**

#### **2.1.1. Self-perceptions in language learning**

Learner perceptions have been associated with two targets: learner perceptions of themselves and learner perceptions of the learning environment (Weseley, 2012). Students' perceptions about themselves are commonly described as the way they comprehend and make sense of themselves and their own learning (Williams & Burden, 1999; Liskin-Gasparro, 1998). Learner perceptions of the learning environment, according to Brown (2009), are related to how students perceive and comprehend elements of the classroom, such as instructor behaviors. However, the majority of researchers have had their studies under the presumption that these two categories of learner perceptions are interrelated (Weseley, 2012). Students' self-perceptions, especially that on their own language proficiency, may influence language learning. This has been discussed in relation to the emotive characteristics of learners, such as the intensity of motivation and crippling language anxiety (Kitano, 2001, MacIntyre et al., 2002). These researchers contend that self-perceptions of language ability are positively correlated with motivational strength and adversely correlated with anxiety levels.

Self-perception might be misunderstood as self-esteem. Actually, they are related but distinct concepts. According to Harter (as cited in Manning et al., 2006), self-esteem is a person's subjective assessment of themselves, or feelings of self-acceptance and self-worth. It is a result of and an influence on how they interact with their environment and the people around them (Kernis, 2003) and is based on awareness of competence, a sense of accomplishment, and engagement with the outside world (Guindon, as cited in Anderson, 2002). As it can be viewed as the outcome of a person's sense of competence and worthiness, self-esteem may be high or low. Students with low self-esteem may avoid taking the required risks to

develop communicative competence in the target language, feel extremely insecure, and even drop out of the class, according to Rubio (2007). Takahashi and Takahashi (2013) stated that if self-esteem is positively associated with self-perception of English proficiency, it may also be positively related to learners' strength of motivation for learning English, and perhaps it favorably affects learners' actual English proficiency, as well as perceived proficiency. Generally, self-perception and self-esteem are interrelated. Low self-esteem and negative self-perception can increase risky behaviors, and are generally associated with academic underachievement among gifted students (Supple et al., 2013) while high self-esteem and positive self-perception have significant influences on personal creativity and productivity, especially during early childhood (Park & Park, 2015).

#### 2.1.2. Speaking skill development

Burns & Joyce (1997) and Luoma (2004) define speaking as an interactive process of generating meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information in an effort to elucidate further on the interactive character of speaking. Speaking ability in this study can be interpreted as having competency in communicating as well as a skill in producing, receiving, and processing information in English.

Many EFL learners prioritize mastering their English-speaking abilities and it is considered the most important skill in acquiring and teaching a language. It is the ability on which students will be evaluated the most in real-life circumstances, according to Brown and Yule (1983). As an essential component of daily interaction, a person's capacity to speak clearly and comprehensively most frequently contributes to such evaluation (Kuning, 2019). Besides, speaking, according to Nunan (2021), is a talent that typically needs to be learnt and exercised. Burns (2012) viewed speaking as a very complicated talent that demands simultaneous cognitive, bodily, and sociocultural processes in which a speaker's knowledge and skill must also be quickly and in real time engaged. It follows that it is the ability to communicate vocally as speaking is seen as a skill that must be honed. For EFL learners, speaking English might be difficult. However, they lack the drive and incentive to improvise their speaking since they are afraid of making mistakes (Rahman et al., 2013). Also, students of the speaking class still struggle to discuss opinions on specific subjects (Anggareni & Wulanjani, 2017).

Therefore, to get this skill successfully enhanced, it is required that students play their active role in working on different aspects such as background knowledge on communication topics, English vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation for accurate use as well as fluent speech in English. This role can be driven by a great source of motivation they may possess and the fear or anxiety they may face. These factors, on the other hand, are affected by students' self-perceptions of their speaking skill as well as their own learning process. Therefore, it is essential that learners positively perceive their learning ability to increase motivation and confidence, and find effective learning strategies to achieve great success in speaking skill development.

#### 2.1.3. The use of technological tools in English speaking development

Students are exposed to the elements of speaking performance more effectively thanks to speaking technology. The availability of modern technology as well as its integration into EFL teaching and learning has proved to be beneficial for students in developing their speaking skill. Common technologies available for teachers of English today can be listed as communication lab, video conferencing, video library, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning), pod casting, Quick Link Pen, Quicktionary, programmes through educational satellites, speech recognition software, blogging, etc. (Kunning, 2019). On the Internet, for example, students can find a wide range of educational materials, such as audio, video, radio and television programs, games, voice recordings, quizzes, podcasts, and more to develop aspects of their speaking competences. Such exposures to the target language helps promote students' English knowledge and skills, leading to the improvement of their speaking skill (Chun, 2003). Studies on the use of such tools have been carried out in the literature with many valuable findings. For instance, a study on technology resources such as the Internet, podcasts, video conferencing, videos, and voice recognition software revealed that they have been seen as means of assisting students in improving their speaking abilities (Omidvar, & Bahadorfar, 2014). Thus, it is essential that technological advancements be incorporated and made use of not only in classroom but also in self-study English speaking activities for the development of students' English speaking ability.

### **2.2. Results of previous studies**

#### 2.2.1. Roles of self-perceptions in language learning

There is a vast body of research on the correlation between perceptions and language learning. (Dörnyei, 2005; Mercer, 2011; Oxford, 2011; Ushioda, 2013). Those researchers have explored the complex relationship between perceptions, motivation, and language learning, and offered insights into how learners can cultivate positive perceptions to enhance their language learning experience. Perceptions can have a significant impact on language learning. How a person perceives their ability to learn a new language can affect their motivation, confidence, and ultimately, their success in learning that language. For example, if someone has a negative perception of their language learning ability, they may feel unmotivated to learn and may avoid practicing the language. On the other hand, if someone has a positive perception of their ability, they may be more motivated to learn and may be more willing to practice the language, even if they make mistakes. Perception can also affect how someone approaches learning a new language. If someone perceives a language as difficult or intimidating, they may be more likely to rely on memorization or avoidance strategies, rather than actively engaging with the language and practicing their skills. Conversely, if someone perceives a language as interesting or valuable, they may be more likely to seek out opportunities to use the language and incorporate it into their daily life.

In the same line, Mat (2017) found the positive correlations between students' perceptions of ability and language learning achievements. Ellis (2008) found such factors affecting students' perceptions as parents, teachers, and extra-curricular exposure to English. Similarly, Boekaerts (1991) argued that learners' strong belief on their learning ability results in their higher expectation of success, then they would improve their performance in English better.

In summary, self-perceptions play a significant role in language learning, influencing motivation, confidence, and learning strategies. It is important for language learners to cultivate positive perceptions of their ability to learn and use a new language, as this can help them achieve greater success in their language learning endeavors.

#### 2.2.2. Popular technological tools for teaching and learning speaking skill

As students learn a new language, educational speaking technology is crucial in giving them useful language experiences as it can be utilized to help provide additional possibilities for EFL students to learn languages (Green, 2005). For instance, Fajariyah's (2009) study on grade-eight students' speaking proficiency showed that by using games, students' speaking performance improved in verbally responding to teachers' questions, recognizing the words and grammar used in expressions, making sentences with proper structures and vocabulary, and expressing their ideas. Shih's (2010) research on video-based blogs sought to develop a blended teaching and learning strategy that incorporated online and in-person instructional blogging. The findings of the study showed that, if used properly, this strategy would promote active learning and leave students feeling happy. The peer and teacher feedback and blog characteristics including free access, easy revision, and engaging learning content were the major factors that increased students' learning pleasure.

The results of a blended course utilizing task-based learning and video recording to improve speaking abilities were examined in a separate study by Kirkgoz (2011). The findings showed that participants improved their speaking abilities significantly and were inspired by the use of technology in the lessons. The results also showed that the usage of the video camera had a favorable impact on how well the students perceived their own performance on the speaking tasks. As for mobile devices, it was claimed that students would continue to use them in the future to explore and engage with nearby real-world environments. In other words, by using materials relevant to their daily lives, students would be able to develop their speaking and listening abilities (Hwang et al., 2014).

Besides, Jalaluddin's study in 2016 on the use of YouTube to improve students' speaking skill concluded some benefits of this tool such as the flexibility which allows students to access the videos for learning anywhere and anytime. By using YouTube, they can expand learning time by practicing speaking English not only in the classroom but also at home and they can be exposed to authentic English in a fun and interesting way. They can hear the pronunciation, increase vocabulary, and see the gestures or expressions of the speakers in the videos, be motivated and involved to learn and stay in the classroom for a longer time. Besides, the study on using YouTube videos to enhance students' speaking ability by Gunada (2017) indicated that utilizing such technology is likely to enhance the speaking abilities of EFL students.

Another popular example of applications to help students practicing English speaking ability is a popular one named CAKE, a mobile educational application that aims to enhance students' speaking skill. It is an

English learning mobile application from South Korea on which students can practice pronunciation and learn vocabulary through conversation (Octavianita et al., 2022). CAKE simulates conversations like native speakers and uses AI to check learners' pronunciation and get immediate feedback and especially, it is "completely free and there are no annoying ads" (Fitria et al., 2021). Besides, this application is an audio-visual learning tool that considerably aids in the learning of vocabulary and expressiveness as well as the retention of long-term memories. According to a substantial body of research, audio-visual aids are pedagogically suitable because they support student-centered, self-paced learning across all professions, encourage students to participate in learning, and ultimately increase students' learning efficacy (McLean et al., 2016; Yeh, 2022).

In 2022, Zhen and Hashim analyzed and synthesized research articles between the year of 2013 and 2022 on MALL for English speaking skill. After the process of identification, screening, and inclusion, 20 articles were selected. Among them, the synthesization of MALL platforms used in learners' readiness to speak in English identified video applications, speaking applications, social networking sites (SNS) and search engines. Seven articles depicted video applications used in learners' readiness to speak English and they reported that learners were able to gain an interest in learning using authentic and real-life contexts. Conversely, six articles also revealed the usage of speaking applications helps students gain motivation and lessen language anxiety as they were practicing speaking skill in a flexible environment. Most of the articles reported that SNS was a popular usage choice in the acquisition of English-speaking skill and WhatsApp was the most-used platform among the other applications. However, only one study reported the usage of search engines (Google) to encourage and develop learners' speaking practices (Zhen & Hashim, 2022).

### 2.2.3. Impacts of technology on the development of English-speaking skill

Research on the use of technology in speaking instruction and its effects on English language learners showed that this practice is essential to EFL learning (Sosas, 2021). She asserted that the effectiveness of EFL students' speaking performances is influenced by the use of speaking technological tools in speaking instructions. Eshankulovna (2021) emphasized using technology to study a second language has become essential in the modern world. The author also suggested that theory and practice in learning a foreign language may be linked together. Utilizing modern technology and modern technology techniques should be applied for effective learning and teaching of speaking skill.

Besides, Sosas (2021) found that students, who were being taught to speak English using modern technologies like video conferencing, email correspondence, social media interaction, live speaking performances on stage, and real-time emceeing, could interact with real academic and professional situations. Additionally, the research showed that using these technologies to teach speaking helps students establish rapport, improve their fluency and accuracy, reduce their fear, and gain confidence. The researcher apparently discovered that the technology utilized in speaking instruction can be connected with the communicative approach to education, enabling students to express themselves in a skillful and competent manner (Sosas, 2021).

In an assessment of the impacts of communication technology on the development of learners' speaking abilities, Khanh (2021) discovered that the use of communication technology improves the students' speaking abilities. He came to the conclusion that, though speaking is not a skill that can be learned at home on their own, the advancement of technology has made it possible for students to study independently outside of the classroom. Technology can stimulate learners' playfulness by immersing them in a variety of environments. It enables independent learning, self-paced interactions, privacy, and a secure environment where mistakes may be corrected and accurate feedback can be given. The ability of a computer to recognize errors and rapidly connect the learner to exercises that concentrate on certain issues adds value to machine feedback (Eshankulovna, 2021).

In conclusion, technological advancements have been recognized to be significant in facilitating the learning and improving speaking skill in a variety of ways. They have provided students with motivating tools and platforms to work independently to improve their communicative competence, gain confidence and reduce fear and anxiety. However, to what extent non-English majored students are motivated to make use of such tools to improve their speaking skill is not clearly identified, especially based on their own perception of their current learning activities to develop speaking skill for themselves. Therefore, it is necessary that this study be conducted to bridge the gap between findings of previous studies and General-

English students' employment of technological tools in relation with their self-perception of the way they are learning to improve this communication skill.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Context and participants of the study

This study was carried out at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, named Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City (IUH). The participants were 1,036 among 3,991 (27%) non-English majored second-year students who enrolled in the General English 2 Course at their study program (B1 CEFR). This explained the convenience strategy used for the sampling of the study. As they registered in the courses at the time this study was conducted (semester 1, academic year 2022-2023, from August to November 2022), they could provide fresh and accurate data. They were from 16 faculties and 2 institutes of the school; therefore, their backgrounds were quite diverse. The students had studied General English 1 Course (A2 CEFR) in the previous semester, that means they obtained a certain level or understanding of the language before the English 2 Course.

#### 3.2. Methodology

The quantitative approach was utilized to examine students' perceptions of their English-speaking learning and the use of technological tools for their self-study English speaking skill. It is an efficient way to gather data from multiple individuals through a questionnaire or form. This scientific approach employs numerical methods which allows researchers to quickly and accurately analyze a large amount of data (Mills & Gay, 2016).

#### 3.3. Data Collection Instruments

An open and closed-ended questionnaire was employed to investigate students' use of technological tools for improving speaking ability. According to Creswell (2002), a questionnaire is a type of survey used to gather information from respondents for research purposes. Among paper-pencil-based, mailed, and web-based questionnaires, the researchers utilized web-based questionnaires due to the popularity of websites and the ease of Internet access. This approach was expected to facilitate faster and more convenient data collection. Therefore, a Google form was created and sent to the students to elicit their opinions on using digital tools for learning English speaking skill. Three main parts are included in the questionnaire: (1) general information about the participants, (2) students' perceptions of their English-speaking learning, (3) student's current use of technological tools for self-development in English-speaking skill based on their self-perceptions.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. General information about the participants

The following table indicates the background of the participants of the study. 1,036 students taking part in the study came from sixteen faculties and two institutes in the university which implicates diverse background of the participants. The majority of students enrolling in General English 2 Course in the semester were in the field of both economy and engineering. The diversity of students' majors has some important influence on their perceptions of language competency as well as language learning strategies.

Table 3.1. Background of the participants

Faculty/Institute	Number	Percentage (%)
Commerce and Tourism	131	12.6%
Finance and Banking	125	12.1%
Mechanical Technology	103	9.9%
Information Technology	100	9.7%
Electrical Engineering Technology	99	9.6%
Institute of Biotechnology and Food Technology	92	8.9%

Chemistry Technology	68	6.6%
Institute of Environmental Science, Technology and Management	63	6.1%
Business Administration	59	5.7%
Heat-Refrigeration Engineering	48	4.6%
Automotive Engineering Technology	43	4.2%
Civil Engineering	27	2.6%
Garment Technology-Fashion	28	2.8%
Accounting-Auditing	23	2.2%
Law	13	1.3%
Electronics Technology	13	1.3%

#### 4.2. Students' perceptions of their current English-speaking learning

The following section reveals how the students self-perceived their current English-speaking learning through their general perceptions of English-skill learning, and the self-evaluation of their current level of speaking skill. In addition, frequency and duration of students' self-study for speaking skill and their expectations to improve English-speaking also contributed to clarify their perceptions of their own learning of speaking skill.

##### 4.2.1. Students' general perceptions of their English-skill learning

The following table presents the participants' general perceptions of their English-speaking learning.

Table 4.1. Students' general perceptions of English-skill learning

No	Factors	Number	Percentage (%)	
1	Skill preference	<b>Speaking</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>37.8%</b>
		Reading	354	34.2%
		Listening	186	18%
		Writing	104	10%
2	Participants' ranking of their most proficient skill	Reading	593	57.2%
		Writing	165	15.9%
		<b>Speaking</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>14.2%</b>
		Listening	131	12.6%
3	The most challenging skill as perceived by the participants	Listening	547	52.8%
		<b>Speaking</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>23.4%</b>
		Writing	227	21.9%
		Reading	20	1.9%
4	English Preference	<b>Like English</b>	<b>825</b>	<b>79.6%</b>
		Do not like English	211	20.4%

As indicated in the table, nearly 80% of the participants enjoyed learning English, and among the four macro skills, speaking was the preferred skill of nearly 38% of the participants. However, only around 14% of them felt proficient at this skill. Listening was perceived as the most challenging skill by nearly 53% of the participants whereas 23.4% found speaking skill particularly difficult.

##### 4.2.2. Students' self-evaluation of their current levels of English-speaking skill

Although many of the students claimed that speaking skill was one of their favorite aspects of language learning, most of them lacked confidence in their ability to communicate in English. Table 4.2 below illustrates the students' self-evaluation of their English proficiency.

Table 4.2. Students' self-evaluation of their speaking level

No.	Categories	Level / Grade	Number	Percentage
1	<b>Self-evaluation on speaking ability</b>	Cannot speak	<b>112</b>	<b>10.8%</b>
		Speak a little bit/very poor English	<b>428</b>	<b>41%</b>
		Speak at an elementary level	<b>400</b>	<b>38.6%</b>
		Speak at an intermediate level	83	8%
		Speak at an advanced level	13	1.3%
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,036</b>	<b>100%</b>
2	<b>Self-reported speaking scores (out of 10 according to Vietnamese grading system)</b>	Under 5	294	28.4%
		5.0-6.5	350	33.8%
		7.0-8.0	191	18.4%
		8.5-10	41	4%
		Exempted from English 1 course	160	15%
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,036</b>	<b>100%</b>

As shown in the Table 4.2 above, approximately 90% of the participants rated their communication ability as elementary or below, indicating a significant lack of proficiency in English-speaking. This was further reflected in their self-reported scores in the Speaking test of the previous English course. One possible explanation for this lack of proficiency may be their reluctance to participate actively in communicative activities in the classroom, which may prevent them from practicing and developing their speaking skill.

#### 4.2.3. Frequency and duration of students' self-study for speaking skill

Table 4.3. Frequency of self-practice and time spent for self-study

No.	Factors		Number	Percentage
1	<b>Frequency of Speaking self-practice</b>	Never	107	10.3%
		Rarely	289	27.9%
		Sometimes	433	41.8%
		Often	142	13.7%
		Always	65	6.3%
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,036</b>	<b>100%</b>
2	<b>Time spent on Self-study speaking activities per day</b>	Less than 15 minutes	402	38.8%
		15-30 minutes	475	45.8%
		30-45 minutes	112	10.8%
		More than 45 minutes	47	4.5%
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,036</b>	<b>100%</b>

The information presented in Table 4.3 demonstrates that a majority of the surveyed students did not prioritize speaking practice in their own time. Only 20% of the respondents reported engaging in regular speaking practice outside of class, despite the acknowledged importance of self-study at the tertiary level. More than half of the participants reported that they rarely or sometimes dedicated time to practicing speaking skill and the average duration of self-study activities was less than half an hour which could not ensure the quality of learning. This information highlights the need to emphasize the importance of regular self-study activities, especially when it comes to speaking practice, as it can significantly enhance language proficiency. It also suggests that students may require additional motivation and guidance to engage in self-study effectively. On the other hand, as Kitano (2001) and MacIntyre (2002) claimed that students' self-perception is positively correlated with motivational strength, and there is a correlation between perceptions and language learning (Dörnyei, 2005; Mercer, 2011; Oxford, 2011; Ushioda, 2013), a similar finding has been noted in this study. Although the students self-perceived their English speaking proficiency at low levels, learning motivation was realized to be weak because they did not carry out their self-study frequently. It is realized and confirmed that when someone has a negative perception of their language



learning ability, they may feel unmotivated to learn and may avoid practicing the language. On the other hand, if someone positively perceives their ability, they may be more motivated to learn and may be more willing to practice the language, despite possible mistakes they may make.

#### 4.2.4. Students' expectations to improve English-speaking ability

Despite their self-perceived limited speaking ability, many of the students expressed a desire to improve their English communication skills. Their expectations and goals being collected from an open-ended question are summarized in the table below.

Table 4.4. Areas that students expect to improve for better English-speaking competence

Areas expected to be improved	Number of respondents	Percentage
Communicative environment with other people	110	<b>31.8</b>
Better pronunciation	98	<b>28.4</b>
More fluency in speaking	53	<b>15.4</b>
Widened vocabulary	38	11
Better listening	24	7
Perfect/ Standard grammar	10	2.9
More confidence in communicating	10	2.9
Flexible responses in speaking situations	2	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>100</b>

*Notes: Answers were provided by 345 out of 1,036 respondents. Others reported that they do not have any ideas, or do not know what to improve and how.*

The table reveals that a great number of the students (31.8%) expected to have an actively communicative environment to enhance their speaking ability as their speaking activities often took place in classroom situation. An active and supportive classroom environment was identified as a key factor in facilitating speaking practice and promoting speaking skill. Students emphasized the need for compulsory speaking activities in class, as well as opportunities to communicate with friends and teachers in English. Besides, they hoped to have more communicative opportunities outside the classroom to practice speaking skill due to the limited time in class.

In addition, better pronunciation, which is essential for effective communication in English was another expectation among learners. Errors with ending sounds and difficult sounds in English prevented them from actively taking part in communicative situations, so 28.4% of participants hoped to receive help with correcting those errors to improve speaking ability. Besides, speaking smoothly and fluently was another significant challenge for language learners at elementary level which accounted for 15.4% of respondents. Struggling to find the right words or phrases to convey their opinions created more hesitation during speaking activities and negatively impacted their speaking fluency. Moreover, lack of vocabulary also emerged as a major obstacle for students in developing their speaking skill which hindered their participation and performance in speaking activities. As a result, students expressed a desire to widen their vocabulary competence. They also expected to improve their listening skill and grammatical foundation knowledge as well as be more confident in real-life conversations.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of creating communicative and supportive learning environment inside and outside the classroom, addressing pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, listening, grammar and confidence in English-speaking instruction, which could promote students' active participation and practice of speaking skill.

To sum up, based on the findings, majority of the students responded that their English-speaking competence was at elementary level and below which matched their range of score for this skill in subject English 1 (mainly under 6.5). It can be inferred that their lack of proficiency in language skills hindered their active participation in communicative activities. It also correlates to their expectations to enhance their speaking capacity via a more interactive learning environment not only in classroom but also in their daily basis. It can be inferred that, to help students achieve these goals, it is essential to create a supportive and

engaging classroom environment that encourages active participation in communicative activities and provides opportunities for students to practice and develop their speaking skill. Additionally, incorporating effective technological tools into language instruction may help enhance students' motivation and engagement, further supporting their language learning goals.

**4.3. Students’ current use of technological tools for the self- improvement of their English-speaking proficiency based on their perceptions**

The self-perception of language learning has been proved to be important because it influences how students approach and engage with language learning (Mercer, 2011). The findings of this second research question proved to be in line with this conclusion. With the demanding requirement of self-efficacy at higher education, and the ambition to better their speaking skill, a number of the participants (Table 4.5) have sought various ways to improve their English-speaking ability. Table 4.5 below reveals how the students have practiced improving English speaking skill in their own ways.

Table 4.5. Self-study activities to improve speaking skill

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	
<b>Self-study activities to improve English speaking skill</b>	Self-study via mobile applications and websites	655	63.2%
	Study with coursebook and assigned tasks	592	57.1%
	Attend extra classes at English center	181	17.5%
	Make friends and communicate with foreigners	176	17%
	Join English club at school	55	5.3%

As for the learning tools for to practice speaking skill on their own, over half of the participants (63.2%) reported that they practiced their speaking skill through applications on their mobile phones and the available websites. These data indicate that learning applications on mobile phones are more and more popular among language learners. More than half of the students (57.1%) also reviewed their lessons from the coursebook and did assigned homework as part of a self-study schedule. Some of them claimed that they went to an English center for further studies and similar numbers of the respondents claimed they made friends with foreigners to practice speaking skill. A limited number of them joined English clubs at their school.

Another open-ended question was used to deeply explore the use of technological tools for self-study activities among the students. Regarding the technological tools for self-study speaking activities, students made a choice for the free web-based tools. Students purposefully chose these websites to learn certain aspects of the English language such as vocabulary or sentence structures to improve the self-assessed low level of English-speaking skill. They claim that the deficiency of vocabulary and grammar knowledge blocked them from engaging in learning activities. Technological applications for learning vocabulary at their level (beginner) with familiar topics was their priority. Most of the students reported that they “watched movies with English subtitles, read English books or newspapers online, and surfed social media such as TikTok or Facebook mainly for learning vocabulary”. They hoped to get be exposed to English accents of native speakers, so that they could imitate and practice later. Through such channels, the available opportunities to listen to native speakers speaking in real-life situations perfectly meet students’ need for a communicative environment with other people. This was one of the students’ high demands presented in Table 4.4., revealing the need of interactive learning space with other speakers of English. Among the options preferred by the English learners, "Watching YouTube videos" and "learning through Duolingo" were also popular responses. YouTube videos, for example, were commonly used by the students to improve their IPA for pronunciation, vocabulary knowledge in specific topics, grammatical structures, etc. While web-based tools provide the learners with foundation knowledge and authentic materials for learning, mobile apps are more advantageous in providing practical speaking opportunities and corrective feedback. Duolingo, a US-based learning app, is one of the most common choices among the students. Other learning applications suggested by the students include Quizlet, Memrise, Enjoy English, Mochimochi, Ted-Talks, Flipgrid, Podcast (Spotify), T-Flat, and Elsa Speak. The frequent activities on the learning applications are listening, watching, and reading, which are the supplementary skills supporting English-speaking

competence. AI technology, indeed, helped the learners to correct their pronunciation and provided them with real-life conversations, which are different from coursebooks (Fitria et al., 2021).

In summary, technological tools such as mobile applications and websites were a solution for an innovative learning environment. The findings of the study are relevant to Rashid & Asghar (2016) which indicates that with technological advancements, language learners could easily access the available learning materials and lessons on the web-based applications as well as video-based platforms. The learning process now is funnier, more enjoyable, and playful (Eshankulovna, 2021) as the participants agreed that utilizing ed-tech applications provided learners with more interesting games and learning activities that maintained their motives.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the study revealed that students had quite a realistic perception of their language learning ability, as confirmed by their reported speaking scores in the previous English 1 course. This self-recognition of their current speaking levels has led to clear expectations to improve their English-speaking skill.

The study also explored how students have utilized technological tools to enhance their English-speaking proficiency based on their self-perceptions. While students generally had a positive attitude towards using such tools in language learning, there was room for improvements, especially in their active use of technological tools. Many students passively consumed the contents in videos and podcasts without actively practicing their speaking skill. To address this, language instructors are advised to incorporate strategies that encourage and support students' self-study activities. The support may include providing guidance on effective study techniques, offering resources for independent practice, and setting specific goals for students' self-study. Instructors may also consider integrating technology-based tools and activities, such as language learning apps and virtual speaking practice sessions, to provide flexible and engaging self-study opportunities.

Overall, promoting self-study activities and providing students with necessary support and resources can lead to significant improvements in language proficiency, especially in speaking skill. Additionally, it is essential that students be provided with opportunities to practice speaking in supportive and engaging environments, such as online language exchange programs or virtual conversation groups. The ongoing research on the students' perceptions of language learning and their use of technological tools is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of language learning in the digital age. For further studies, it is suggested that a correlation or a hypothesis-test be included in the follow-up research of this study to find out the relationship between each group of participants' self-perceptions of their English-speaking proficiency and their actual engagement in the technological tools, which have been used for the purpose of developing this oral productive skill.

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**NGHIÊN CỨU NHẬN THỨC VỀ NĂNG LỰC TIẾNG ANH VÀ VIỆC SỬ DỤNG  
CÁC CÔNG CỤ CÔNG NGHỆ ĐỂ TỰ PHÁT TRIỂN KHẢ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG  
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**Tóm Tắt.** Sự phát triển của công nghệ đã góp phần đáng kể vào sự phát triển nhanh chóng của xã hội trong những thập kỷ qua, tác động sâu sắc đến các lĩnh vực và dịch vụ, đặc biệt là lĩnh vực giáo dục. Việc tích hợp công nghệ trong quá trình giảng dạy đã trở thành một giải pháp nhằm tối ưu hoá việc đổi mới hệ thống giáo dục. Trong bối cảnh đó, nghiên cứu này được tiến hành nhằm tìm hiểu việc các sinh viên (SV) không chuyên Ngôn ngữ Anh tự đánh giá và nhận thức như thế nào về khả năng nói tiếng Anh của mình cũng như việc họ đã sử dụng các công cụ công nghệ như thế nào để phát triển kỹ năng này. Nghiên cứu khảo sát 1.036 trên tổng số 3.991 SV không chuyên Ngôn ngữ Anh đang theo học tại một trường đại học công lập ở Việt Nam. Dữ liệu cho thấy rằng, mặc dù các SV được khảo sát có nhận thức tích cực về việc học tiếng Anh, họ cũng nhận thức được các khía cạnh cần cải thiện trong kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh của mình. Nghiên cứu cũng cho thấy các SV đã sử dụng một số công cụ công nghệ để cải thiện khả năng nói tiếng Anh của họ. Các kết quả của nghiên cứu nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của việc tích hợp các công cụ công nghệ vào việc dạy và học tiếng Anh nhằm tạo ra nhiều cơ hội cho SV tham gia vào việc thực hành để tự cải thiện kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh. Ngoài ra, nghiên cứu cũng nhấn mạnh vai trò quan trọng của giáo viên trong việc thúc đẩy việc áp dụng công nghệ giúp SV trau dồi ngôn ngữ đang học trong các môi trường khác nhau.

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