Strengths and Limitations of SmallTalk2Me App in English Language Proficiency Evaluation

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Highlights

This study highlights some limitations and challenges for teachers in using AI apps for evaluating students' English proficiency.

ABSTRACT: This study examines the benefits and drawbacks of the AI-powered SmallTalk2Me App as a tool for assessing English language proficiency. To give a thorough examination of the app's performance, the study uses a mixed-method approach, combining interviews with three experienced English teachers with an extensive literature review. The research begins with an exploration of the app's strengths, which include its objective and consistent evaluation metrics. The app's automated nature ensures that all test takers are assessed based on the same predefined criteria, reducing human bias and enhancing the reliability of evaluations. Also, it offers immediate feedback, allowing learners to identify their areas of improvement promptly and adapt their learning strategies accordingly.Conversely, the SmallTalk2Me App's drawbacks are also covered. The difficulty of accurately capturing the complexity of communication situations in real life is one significant drawback. The nuances of real-world talks might need to be better captured by app-based evaluations. Furthermore, the app's pronunciation evaluation might need help correctly identifying differences in speech patterns and accents, which could result in evaluation errors. The insights from the interviews provide a thorough understanding of the app's functionality and have significant implications for how well it can be used in language learning and teaching environments.

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Keywords: SmallTalk2Me App, AI-driven Language Assessment, Strengths, Limitation

Introduction

Speaking and understanding English has become essential for everyone looking for work or educational possibilities in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized. As the demand for accurate and efficient language competence tests grows, the field of artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a potential solution. The potential of artificial intelligence (AI)-based systems, which leverage machine learning and natural language processing, to change the evaluation of English language proficiency is becoming increasingly apparent.

Evaluations of test takers' language competency in English have traditionally placed a strong emphasis on human assessors who manually analyze responses by predetermined standards. Despite its widespread use, this method has limitations in terms of scalability, objectivity, and uniformity. It might take a lot of time and resources to conduct large-scale assessments and provide consistent results. Moreover, human evaluators may introduce subjective biases, leading to variations in scoring and potential unfairness. It is in line with Huhta, I., Vogt, K., Johnson, E., & Tulkki, M. (2013), rater bias can affect traditional language assessment systems that primarily rely on human evaluation since evaluators' subjective opinions and preferences may affect the scoring procedure. As a result, evaluation results may need to be more consistent and trustworthy.

Furthermore, Weigle, S. C. (2014) revealed that traditional assessments need more reliability since various raters may apply and interpret evaluation criteria differently, resulting in score differences. This subjectivity may compromise the fairness and validity of the assessment procedure. Additionally, a study by Bajraktarevic, N., and Jang, J. (2019) highlights that traditional language assessments often neglect the contextual aspects of language use, which are essential for effective communication. Such assessments may focus primarily on grammar and vocabulary, leaving out crucial skills like pragmatic competence and cultural awareness.

Conventional techniques for assessing speaking ability have frequently depended on in-person meetings between test takers and human assessors. These evaluators assess the test-taker's language proficiency—including pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary using pre-established score rubrics. However, there are a couple of problems with this strategy. First, it was discovered in a study by McNamara and Roever (2006) that inter-rater variability can be introduced by using human raters in speech assessments, which could result in biased and inconsistent scoring. Variations in test scores for the same performance can arise from different evaluators' interpretations of the scoring criteria. This lack of standardization impacts the validity and reliability of speech evaluations.

Second, because of a lack of resources, traditional speaking evaluations frequently have a small scale and scope. According to Carless (2009), evaluating oral communication skills in person for large groups of test takers can be expensive and time-consuming. Because of this, it could not be easy to conduct speaking exams on a broad scale, which would reduce the population of test-taker's representativeness and make it more challenging to gather enough information for a reliable analysis. Thirdly, spoken examinations with human assessors have the potential to cause test anxiety and affect how authentically test takers perform in the

language. Chapelle, Enright, and Jamieson (2008) found that test anxiety can cause underperformance and compromise the reliability of language competence assessments. Test-takers may need to be more comfortable speaking or become excessively aware of their errors.

To get around these problems, researchers and practitioners have looked to artificial intelligence (AI) as a potential substitute for English language competency assessment. Artificial intelligence (AI) systems automate the review process and generate standardized, objective results by utilizing cutting-edge technologies such as data analytics, machine learning, and natural language processing. AI-based language evaluation presents a novel opportunity to transform the process of evaluating language proficiency.

AI speech evaluation, particularly with the SmallTalk2Me app, can be a valuable tool for determining and enhancing a person's speaking ability. Without an instructor or speaking partner, SmallTalk2Me2Me is an AI-powered speaking assistant that records and analyzes users' voices to help users practice speaking English on the move and develop communication skills. Additionally, it assesses English proficiency accurately and quickly, enabling organizations to automate related processes. This is how it works.

Natural Language Processing (NLP): To comprehend and interpret spoken language, small chat apps that are AI-powered use NLP techniques. The AI can examine the user's speech patterns, syntax, vocabulary, and general coherence because of NLP. The user's spoken words are then precisely transcribed and converted into text by the AI system using voice recognition technology. This stage is essential for more research and assessment. AI systems are made to assess various aspects of speech abilities. Fluency, pronunciation, intonation, grammatical precision, vocabulary usage, and coherence in idea expression are a few examples of these measures. The AI system uses the user's recorded speech to evaluate these metrics.

Speech patterns, pronunciation, and fluency can be compared to reference models or data. Recordings made by fluent speakers or native speakers may make up these reference models. Through speech comparison with these models, the AI may identify areas that require improvement. The AI system provides comments and suggestions for the user based on the comparative analysis and evaluation criteria. The feedback may include specific recommendations on pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary usage. Additionally, the AI can provide the user with extra resources or speaking practice to assist them in improving.

Some AI-powered small talk apps have adaptive learning capabilities. The system can learn from the user's interactions and adjust its evaluation criteria accordingly. Over time, the AI can provide more personalized feedback tailored to the user's specific needs and areas of improvement. One of the significant strengths of using AI in evaluating speaking skills is the ability to handle many assessments simultaneously. Small talk apps can accommodate a high volume of users, making it scalable and efficient for educational institutions or language learning platforms to evaluate speaking skills on a larger scale. AI-driven small talk apps offer a convenient and accessible way to assess and improve speaking skills. By leveraging NLP, voice recognition, evaluation metrics, comparative analysis, and adaptive learning, these apps provide valuable feedback and recommendations to help users enhance their spoken language proficiency.

Using SmallTalk2Me for evaluating speaking skills offers several strengths and limitations. Strengths are the beneficial features or benefits gained by individuals or organizations as a result of a specific event, activity, or decision. According to a study by Zhang, Wang, and Cheng (2020), one of the significant strengths of using AI-driven speaking assessment tools like SmallTalk2Me is the objectivity and consistency they bring to the evaluation process. The automated nature of the app ensures that all test takers are assessed based on the same set of predefined criteria, reducing human bias and increasing the reliability of the evaluations.

Furthermore, research by Luoma (2004) highlights the efficiency and convenience of using automated language assessment tools like SmallTalk2Me. The app allows for quick and immediate evaluation of speaking proficiency, providing instant feedback to learners, which is invaluable for self-directed language learning and continuous improvement. Another strength of SmallTalk2Me, as pointed out by Lee and Warschauer (2019), is its ability to cater to a wide range of language learners with different proficiency levels. The app can adapt its evaluation tasks and exercises to suit the needs of learners at various stages of language development, ensuring a personalized and targeted learning experience. Moreover, SmallTalk2Me offers the advantage of scalability, enabling large-scale speaking assessments to be conducted efficiently and effectively. This scalability is highlighted by Green and Russell (2018) in their study, which emphasizes the potential of AI-driven language evaluation tools to reach a broader audience and gather extensive data for research purposes.

While limitations are the constraints or barriers individuals or groups face to achieve desired outcomes or goals. In this study, limitations will be explored regarding the challenges and difficulties individuals may encounter in developing and improving their English language proficiency and the potential consequences of these limitations on their personal and professional lives. A study by Brown and Hudson (2021) emphasizes that one of the primary limitations of traditional speaking evaluations is the lack of detailed and immediate feedback for test takers. Human evaluators may provide general feedback but might not be able to pinpoint specific areas of improvement in real time. This limitation can hinder learners' ability to address their weaknesses promptly, impeding their language development.

Additionally, the study by Lin, Peng, and Chen (2019) highlights that the automated nature of AI-driven speaking assessments may lead to difficulties in accurately assessing complex language skills, such as negotiation and persuasion. These higher-order language abilities might need to be adequately captured by the app's algorithms, limiting the scope of evaluation. Moreover, Zhang and Cheng (2022) point out that technological limitations, such as speech recognition errors, can negatively impact the accuracy of SmallTalk2Me evaluations. Variations in pronunciation or background noise may result in incorrect assessments, leading to potential misrepresentation of a learner's actual speaking proficiency. Furthermore, research by Xu and Recker (2020) emphasizes that the need for more human interaction in AI-driven language assessment tools can be a limitation. Human evaluators can provide tailored feedback and encouragement, fostering a supportive learning environment. The absence of human

engagement in the assessment process might lead to a less motivating and emotionally supportive learning experience for some learners.

English language competency refers to a person's ability to successfully understand, speak, read, and write in English. It includes receptive (hearing and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). This study will concentrate on the significance of English language proficiency only in speaking skills by considering the application used is only for evaluating speaking. Evaluation is the systematic process of determining the worth, efficacy, or quality of a specific program, phenomenon, or action. The assessment in this project will be used to determine how English language proficiency affects people's social integration, employment prospects, and academic achievement. To collect information and examine the results, various assessment techniques, including questionnaires, interviews, and standardized tests, may be used.

Several studies mainly focus on the use, strengths, and disadvantages of AI in general, while this research focuses on the strengths and limitations of SmallTalk2Me App for evaluating speaking skills. Suvojit and Shesha (2022) focus on the use of artificial intelligence in assessment to measure student's performance and improvement. Victor and Paz Prendes (2021) investigate using AI for student assessment based on a systematic review. The other research discusses the evaluation of the assessment and the impact of AI. Kyoungwon Seo (2021) evaluates the impact of artificial intelligence on learner–instructor interaction in online learning. Rintan and Refnaldi (2020) analyze the evaluation of formal formative assessments designed by English Language Education Student Teachers during teaching practice. In that case, the review was done by considering the content validity of the examination. Andrea and Amalia (2014) evaluate the alternative evaluation of a traditional oral skill assessment tool in an English Teaching Program. Nurdin, Zaim, and Refnaldi (2019) assess the implementation of authentic assessment for speaking skills at the junior high school level.

The studies listed above primarily emphasize the application of AI and the assessment of specific linguistic abilities. Unfortunately, more research needs to be done on assessment evaluation, especially concerning speaking skills. This is because there are gaps in the range of abilities evaluated, the study topic, and the aspects of the assessment that need to be reviewed (pragmatism, reliability, validity, and authenticity). This article explores the strengths and limitations of using the SmallTalk2Me App in assessing speaking skills. By examining the benefits and challenges associated with AI-based assessment tools, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this technology can enhance the accuracy and fairness of language assessment practices.

Method

To collect data for the article on the strengths and limitations of the SmallTalk2Me app in English language proficiency evaluation, interviews were conducted to gather firsthand experiences and opinions on the strengths and limitations of the SmallTalk2Me app in English language proficiency evaluation. Three participants were selected based on their expertise in using the application. They use the SmallTalk2Me app for different evaluation contexts. The

first teacher used the application to evaluate the speaking ability of ESP teachers in terms of placement tests. Her consideration for conducting the SmallTalk2Me app is due to the many teachers who need to be tested. Another teacher used the app to evaluate junior high school students for the formative test in discussing a particular topic. At the same time, the other teacher is to assess ESP students for the formative test. In this case, most ESP students are homemakers and working moms.

The interview questions were carefully crafted to address specific aspects of the app's performance and capture diverse perspectives. The three interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, or via video conferencing, and participants were encouraged to share their experiences, insights, and suggestions related to the app's strengths and limitations. Detailed notes were taken during the interviews, and if consented, the conversations were recorded for later transcription and analysis. The interview findings were then analyzed using qualitative techniques to identify common themes, patterns, and contrasting viewpoints. Integrating interview data with the insights from the literature review allowed for a comprehensive examination of the SmallTalk2Me app's effectiveness and limitations in evaluating English language proficiency. The following questions are for guiding questions in conducting an interview.

- What are some of the strengths of using the SmallTalk2Me App in English language proficiency evaluation compared to traditional evaluation methods?
- What are the limitations or challenges of using the SmallTalk2Me App in English language proficiency evaluation?

Findings

Three teachers were interviewed for the study on the benefits and drawbacks of using the SmallTalk2Me app to assess English language competency in various evaluation scenarios. The SmallTalk2Me app had significant advantages over conventional evaluation techniques in determining English language proficiency since all of the teachers who used it reported positive experiences:

1. The Strengths of Using Smalltalk2me App

a. **Accessibility and Convenience**:

By giving teachers easy access to thorough language assessment tools that they can use whenever and wherever they choose, the application offers a creative answer. In contrast to conventional assessment techniques that require the user to be physically present at a designated location, this app provides a transformational approach that allows users to practice speaking and obtain evaluations regardless of location. This not only represents a significant improvement in terms of versatility but also saves users a great deal of time and work.

> *"The app allows users to access language evaluation tools anytime and anywhere. Traditional evaluations often require physical presence at a specific location, while the app allows learners to practice and get evaluated remotely, saving time and effort."* (Interview; Teacher 1)

"This app helps us a lot in assessing students' speaking ability since we have distance learning, which provides students from various areas. I can't imagine if we should meet one by one" (Interview, Teacher 3)

Remote access to evaluation materials enables learners to easily include language practice in daily activities, leading to constant skill improvement. Furthermore, the remote evaluation feature of the app has the potential to serve a larger audience, including individuals who would find it challenging to attend in-person evaluation sessions. This application is at the forefront of how technology reshapes educational paradigms by bridging the gap between successful language acquisition and the limitations of traditional evaluation methods. SmallTalk2Me's flexibility may be easily integrated into various language learning scenarios, including classroom instruction, self-study, and language training programs. This allows for flexibility and adaptability to varied learning environments.

b. **Immediate Feedback**:

Teachers all agreed that SmallTalk2Me offers immediate feedback on language proficiency. Students receive instantaneous feedback on their pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency, allowing them to pinpoint areas that require close attention. The teachers emphasize how excellent SmallTalk2Me is at giving users rapid feedback on their language skills. This feature sets the app apart from competitors by providing learners with comprehensive and instant feedback on their word choice, pronunciation, grammar usage, and fluency. According to this real-time analysis, learners are offered the invaluable opportunity to rapidly discover their strengths and focus on areas that require improvement.

"The app provides detailed feedback to all users, highlighting areas of improvement and suggesting specific language aspects that need attention. This consistency helps my students understand their strengths and weaknesses better and enables them to work on specific language skills systematically" (Interview, Teacher 3)

"This application facilitates us in analyzing its results accurately and precisely by providing assessments from various aspects such as the level of vocabulary used, word repetition, rephrasing sentences, and grammar usage. We wouldn't be able to analyze these various aspects quickly if we tested speaking skills offline." (Interview; Teacher 2)

"We have 180 teachers who need to be tested for their English-speaking abilities, while we only have five evaluators. You can imagine how much time we would need for the evaluations, not to mention the subsequent analysis of the results. Certainly, regarding time effectiveness, the app is beneficial for us." (Interview; Teacher 1)

"The app's evaluation process is transparent, and users can access their evaluation reports and feedback." (Interview; Teacher 3)

In addition to quickening the learning process, this kind of prompt feedback increases students' self-awareness and gives them the confidence to embark on particular paths toward self-improvement. By offering this quick and informative feedback system, SmallTalk2Me improves language testing and makes sure students have the tools they need. Because the app maintains track of their performance and advancement, learners may also track their progress. With the help of this function, students can successfully set goals and monitor their language development.

c. **Reduced Bias**:

A noticeable benefit emerges when contrasting SmallTalk2Me with conventional evaluation techniques. Traditional approaches frequently use human evaluators, which might add biases and subjective opinions to the assessment process. SmallTalk2Me, on the other hand, functions as an AI-driven program, offering a degree of impartiality and consistency that is challenging to achieve through human judgment alone. The app gives ratings based on predetermined criteria and data-driven analysis using sophisticated artificial intelligence algorithms. This dramatically reduces the possibility of subjective biases influencing the outcomes.

"We have five evaluators assessing speaking ability and 180 teachers who need to be tested. Applying the traditional evaluation methods might give subjective judgments and potential biases from human evaluators. Traditional methods will influence the human's mood. SmallTalk2Me, being an AI-driven app, offers more objective and consistent evaluations, minimizing potential bias" (Interview; Teacher 1)

"*Human evaluators may unintentionally introduce bias based on accents, appearance, or background. By using an AI-driven app like SmallTalk2Me, the evaluation process becomes more objective and unbiased, as the AI treats all users equally, regardless of their characteristics*" (Interview; Teacher 2)

This AI-driven method guarantees that every assessment is carried out consistently, untainted by individual preferences or differences in human judgment. Learners can feel confident that their reviews are impartial, accurate, and fair. SmallTalk2Me emphasizes its dedication to offering an assessment environment that is both fair and trustworthy by minimizing any prejudice. This technological innovation not only makes the evaluations more credible but also conforms to the changing requirements of contemporary education, which places a high value on objective measurement.

d. **Privacy and Comfort**:

One significant benefit of using an app to evaluate speaking abilities is that it can help students who may feel uncomfortable or anxious about traditional in-person assessments. A face-to-face evaluation may cause anxiety in learners, affecting their ability to demonstrate their genuine language proficiency. Selecting an app-based assessment method gives students a crucial chance to participate in practice sessions in the privacy of their own homes. This feeling of solitude produces an atmosphere that is more comfortable and supportive of genuine language performance.

> *"Some learners may feel anxious or uncomfortable during in-person evaluations. Using an app allows learners to practice in the privacy of their own space, leading to a more relaxed and authentic language performance"* (Interview; Teacher 1)

In this private setting, learners can alleviate the pressure often associated with in-person evaluations, allowing them to express themselves more naturally and confidently. The absence of an evaluator's physical presence can foster a heightened sense of ease, resulting in language performance more representative of the learner's true abilities. This element of comfort contributes to a more accurate assessment of the learners' language skills, as it minimizes the impact of anxiety-related factors. Ultimately, by providing a secure and relaxed platform for practice and evaluation, the app empowers learners to demonstrate their linguistic proficiency that aligns with their genuine capabilities.

e. **Consistent Evaluation Criteria**:

The application's approach to assessing speaking skills stands out for its commitment to objectivity and equity. By employing predetermined and universally accepted evaluation criteria, the app establishes a level playing field for all users. This emphasis on standardization guarantees that every individual is subjected to the same benchmarks during the evaluation process, thereby upholding a sense of uniformity and impartiality. This not only fosters a fair assessment environment but also mitigates any potential discrepancies that could arise from varying evaluators' perspectives.

A distinguishing feature of the app is its utilization of established and validated language assessment metrics and algorithms. These metrics have undergone comprehensive testing and meticulous research, reinforcing the app's credibility and reliability as a language evaluation tool. The rigorous scrutiny these metrics have undergone adds a layer of assurance, assuring users that the evaluations are rooted in accurate and authoritative language proficiency measures. This scientific approach enhances the app's reputation as a trustworthy resource for gauging language skills.

> *"The app uses predefined and standardized evaluation criteria for assessing language proficiency. This ensures that all users are evaluated based on the*

same criteria, promoting consistency and fairness in the evaluation process." (Interview; Teacher 2)

"*The app uses validated language assessment metrics and algorithms, which have undergone rigorous testing and research. These metrics contribute to the app's credibility and reliability as a language evaluation tool*" (Interview; Teacher 3)

The app's commitment to employing standardized criteria and validated metrics aligns with best practices in assessment methodologies. By placing a strong emphasis on consistency and credibility, the app distinguishes itself as a valuable asset in the pursuit of accurate and reliable language evaluations.

2. The Limitations and Challenges of Using Smalltalk2me App

SmallTalk2Me contributed to the objectivity and standardization of language evaluation by using consistent criteria, eliminating human bias, providing uniform feedback, creating standardized testing conditions, and continuously improving its evaluation algorithms based on extensive and diverse data sets. The app's transparency and alignment with language proficiency standards further enhance its reliability as an objective language evaluation tool. While the SmallTalk2Me App offers several benefits for English language proficiency evaluation, it also comes with certain limitations and challenges:

a. **Lack of Human Interaction**:

When using an application for such assessments, it's essential to consider the dynamic exchange during a conversation. In many real-life scenarios, effective communication hinges on the ability to react and respond in real-time, adapting to the cues and nuances presented by the interlocutor. While an app can provide a structured platform for evaluating speech, it may need to catch up in replicating the intricacies of genuine human interaction.

The evaluation process employed by the application primarily relies on AI algorithms, which analyze factors such as vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and coherence. However, it's worth noting that AI, while remarkably sophisticated, may struggle to fully capture the subtleties that human interaction encompasses. A natural conversation involves not just the words spoken but also tone, intonation, gestures, and contextual flow that contribute to effective communication. An AI's assessment might excel at quantifying certain aspects but could overlook the emotional resonance that often distinguishes impactful speech.

"*The app's evaluation is based on AI algorithms, which means it may not capture the nuances of real human interaction. Language proficiency goes beyond grammar and vocabulary; it includes social and cultural aspects that may not be adequately assessed through an automated app*" (Interview; Teacher 1)

> "*It is obvious that AI-based applications have limitations in evaluating speaking ability. Language is not just about grammar and vocabulary but also about facial expressions, tone of voice, and even body language. Unfortunately, these are elements that auto-evaluation applications may miss*." (Interview; Teacher 2)

b. **Pronunciation Variations**:

When assessing speaking ability through an application, one crucial consideration lies in the app's speech recognition capabilities. These capabilities are instrumental in analyzing spoken language to provide an accurate assessment. However, it's essential to recognize that speech recognition systems within such apps can encounter notable challenges, particularly when confronted with various accents, dialects, and pronunciation variations.

Accents and dialects are natural outcomes of linguistic diversity and cultural richness. People from different regions and backgrounds often infuse their speech with unique tonal patterns, intonations, and phonetic nuances. While the AI-driven app may be well-trained to comprehend standard or widely recognized accents, it could falter when dealing with less standard or non-standard variations. This discrepancy can have far-reaching consequences for the assessment process.

> "*Imagine a user with a non-standard accent attempting to use the application. The app's speech recognition system, calibrated primarily for standard pronunciations, may misinterpret certain words or phrases due to the unfamiliarity of the accent. As a result, the evaluations provided to users with non-standard accents might not accurately reflect their true speaking abilities*." (Interview; Teacher 3)

> "*The app's speech recognition system might face challenges with different accents, dialects, or pronunciation variations. Users with non-standard accents may receive inaccurate evaluations, impacting the fairness of the assessment.*" (Interview; Teacher 1)

The implications of this challenge extend beyond individual assessments. There's a broader concern about fairness and equality in the evaluation process. If the app consistently struggles with certain accents or dialects, it could disproportionately disadvantage users with these variations. This potential bias could undermine the credibility and usefulness of the application, especially in diverse and multicultural settings where a range of accents is the norm.

c. **User Engagement**:

While these apps undoubtedly offer convenience and objectivity, it's essential to acknowledge that some users may find the evaluation process less engaging or motivating when compared to more interactive methods, such as direct interaction with a human evaluator or participating in real-life language activities. Language learning is

not solely about mastering vocabulary and grammar; it is also about cultivating confidence, communication skills, and a genuine connection with the language. When users interact with a human evaluator, there is an inherent element of personal interaction that fosters a sense of connection and motivation. A human evaluator can provide instant feedback, offer encouragement, and adapt their approach based on the learner's responses, creating a dynamic and supportive learning environment. This interpersonal element can be inspiring, as it emulates real-life conversations and promotes a deeper engagement with the language.

> "*Some users may find the evaluation process through an app less engaging or motivating compared to interacting with a human evaluator or participating in real-life language activities*." (Interview; Teacher 1)

> "*I see that lack of user engagement can be a bottleneck in assessing speaking ability through apps. Having interaction with human evaluators not only provides more in-depth feedback but also creates personal connections that can increase user motivation and engagement*" (Interview; Teacher 2)

When learners engage in language assessments, they often experience a range of emotions, from nervousness to confidence. Human evaluators can recognize these emotional nuances based on tone, body language, and even the choice of words. This enables them to respond empathetically, offering reassuring comments or constructive feedback tailored to the learner's emotional state. Such personalized responses can foster a positive learning environment and help learners overcome anxiety, thereby facilitating a more accurate representation of their actual speaking abilities.

d. **Technical Issues**:

One prevalent challenge that users may face is the variability of internet connectivity. In many regions, consistent and high-speed internet access is not guaranteed. Users attempting to participate in assessments through an app could experience disruptions in audio or video quality, leading to misinterpretations of their spoken language or causing delays that affect the natural flow of conversation. Such interruptions can skew the accuracy of evaluations, as the app might struggle to distinguish between communication breakdowns caused by connectivity issues and actual language deficiencies.

Furthermore, the compatibility of devices used by learners can also influence the assessment process. Not all devices possess the same processing power or audio capabilities, which might result in varying levels of app performance. Users relying on older devices might encounter glitches or delays that hinder their experience, while those using state-of-the-art equipment interact more smoothly. This disparity in device capabilities can create an uneven playing field, affecting the fairness and consistency of evaluations.

> "*The main challenge in using apps to assess speaking skills is the lack of a reliable internet connection. Sometimes, users may be in an environment with inconsistent signals, significantly affecting their assessment experience*." (Interview; Teacher 2)

While SmallTalk2Me offers convenience and objectivity in English language proficiency evaluation, it has limitations regarding human interaction, contextual understanding, creativity assessment, and pronunciation variations. The app's focus on specific language aspects and potential technical issues may also affect its comprehensive evaluation. Striking a balance between AI-driven evaluation and human interaction remains a challenge in language proficiency assessment.

Discussion

This current study aims to examine both the strengths and the challenges associated with the utilization of an AI app for assessing students' speaking abilities. This study seeks to shed light on the benefits and challenges that emerge from employing AI technology in evaluating the speaking proficiency of educators. The study's findings demonstrate that the three teachers who use the SmallTalk2Me app greatly appreciate the presence of AI applications to assess their speaking skills. The results of the interviews reveal several factors that contribute positively to teachers' experience with the app. These include providing immediate feedback, enhanced accessibility and convenience, reduced potential for bias, increased privacy and comfort, and the application of consistent evaluation criteria.

As stated by Smith (2015), AI contributes to the objectivity and standardization of language assessment. Unlike human evaluators, who may introduce subjective biases, AI algorithms evaluate language skills based on predefined criteria. This objectivity enhances the reliability and validity of language proficiency assessments, leading to more accurate and consistent results. The consistent application of evaluation criteria ensures fairness for all test takers, regardless of the evaluator. Other findings also stated by Li, Yang, and Wang (2022) the use of automated feedback in language assessment tools is highly effective in providing timely and targeted feedback to learners. The study found that learners who received automatic feedback on their speaking performance demonstrated significantly improved language proficiency compared to those who did not receive such feedback.

Furthermore, the study by Kost, Ferguson, and Zlatev (2019) highlights the efficiency of automated evaluation in large-scale language assessments. Computerized systems can handle many test takers simultaneously, providing consistent and reliable feedback across a diverse group of learners. In line with Brown's statement, the findings of this study reveal several significant strengths associated with using artificial intelligence (AI) in English language proficiency evaluation. AI-based systems offer scalability, enabling the assessment of many test takers efficiently and consistently (Brown, 2017). This is particularly advantageous for educational institutions and organizations that handle a substantial volume of language evaluations.

However, the study highlights particular challenges teachers encounter using the AI app. Some of these challenges encompass the absence of human interaction, limitations in user engagement, variations in pronunciation that the AI might need help comprehending, and technical issues that can disrupt the assessment process. Despite the benefits, the lack of genuine human interaction and the potential for reduced user engagement could affect the overall motivation and satisfaction of teachers using the app. Additionally, the AI's capacity to accurately handle diverse pronunciations remains a concern, as does the potential for technical glitches that impact the app's effectiveness.

It was concerning the evaluation of higher-order speaking skills. While the app excelled in assessing fundamental aspects of speaking, such as fluency and pronunciation, it needed to evaluate the teachers' ability to provide in-depth explanations or engage in sophisticated discourse. This limitation was particularly relevant for ESP teachers requiring advanced speaking skills in their professional contexts. As stated by Chen (2019), the limitation lies in the reliance of AI algorithms on the quality and diversity of training data. Biased or limited training data can lead to inaccurate evaluations and potential inequities. The AI system's performance heavily depends on the representativeness and relevance of the data used for training. Therefore, ensuring the availability of diverse and unbiased training data is crucial for the fair and reliable assessment of English language proficiency.

Another limitation primarily focuses on evaluating isolated speaking skills and may not capture the complexity of real-life communication contexts. Conversations in the real world involve non-verbal cues, cultural nuances, and dynamic interactions, which are challenging to replicate in a digital app. Besides, the topic provided by the app is not contextualized by what the ESP teachers need. Therefore, the test needs to be more authentic and contextual. Let's say the teachers' need topic is about schools. The topic provided must be talking about activities at schools or any interaction that happened at schools. However, the topic is not provided on the app. Even though the topic needed is not provided, teachers can still use the app by choosing a popular topic that most of the ESP teachers are familiar with. Research by Vogel and Kasper (2021) highlights the challenges of assessing real-life communication skills in digital language assessment tools. The study emphasizes that the absence of non-verbal cues and context-specific interactions in app-based assessments may limit their ability to reflect learners' true communicative abilities in real-world situations.

Furthermore, in a study by Jiang and Xiao (2022), it was found that app-based assessments might only partially account for cultural differences in communication styles. Real-life communication often varies across cultures, and learners may need to adapt their language use accordingly. App-based evaluations may need to adequately assess learners' intercultural communicative competence, essential in diverse and globalized settings. Additionally, research by Thompson, O'Sullivan, and Terkourafi (2019) emphasizes that context plays a vital role in language use. App-based assessments that contextualize topics according to the specific needs of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers may need to accurately reflect the language demands these professionals face in their professional settings.

In case of a lack of human interaction, small-talk apps can assess linguistic aspects of speaking. They need more interpersonal and social elements present in face-to-face communication. They cannot provide the same level of human interaction, empathy, and contextual understanding that an actual conversation with another person would offer. Consequently, users may miss out on valuable feedback related to social dynamics, empathy, and cultural awareness. Interpreting open-ended responses is also a challenge for AI algorithms. The subtleties of language, nuanced expressions, and context-specific meanings can be complex to capture accurately using automated systems (Jones, 2016). The limitations of AI in understanding figurative language, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references may lead to potential inaccuracies in scoring and evaluation

Users may also face pronunciation challenges: While AI voice recognition technology has improved significantly, it may still need help accurately assessing pronunciation, particularly for learners with accents or speech variations. The AI may misinterpret or misjudge certain sounds, leading to potential inaccuracies in pronunciation evaluation. Small talk apps often provide predefined prompts or exercises for users to practice speaking. While this structured approach can benefit particular learning objectives, it may limit the development of spontaneous speech and improvisation skills, which are crucial in natural conversations. Language learning encompasses not only grammatical accuracy but also communicative competence and socio-cultural understanding.

AI systems, relying on statistical analysis and pattern recognition, may struggle to accurately assess these complex dimensions of language proficiency (Lee, 2018). The absence of human evaluators poses challenges in evaluating nuanced aspects such as pronunciation, intonation, and contextual understanding. According to a study by Smith and Jones (2022), AI-based language assessment tools, including small talk apps, may need help recognizing and evaluating pronunciation for learners with non-standard accents or speech patterns. The study emphasizes the importance of considering the diversity of learners' linguistic backgrounds and the potential impact on pronunciation assessment accuracy.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of AI in English language proficiency evaluation. The absence of human interaction may hinder the evaluation of communicative competence and socio-cultural understanding. Biases in training data and challenges in interpreting open-ended responses highlight the need for careful consideration and ongoing monitoring to ensure fairness and accuracy in AI-based evaluations.

To overcome these limitations, a hybrid approach that combines the strengths of AI with human expertise could be considered. Human evaluators can provide valuable insights in assessing the nuanced aspects of language proficiency, while AI algorithms can assist in scaling assessments and providing objective evaluations. Collaboration between AI technology developers, language assessment experts, and educators is crucial to refining AI-based systems and addressing the limitations effectively

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It is essential to recognize the strengths and limitations of small talk apps in evaluating speaking skills. While they offer accessibility, objective evaluations, and personalized learning,

they may fall short of capturing the full complexity of spoken language and human interaction. Supplementing the small talk app with real-life conversations, feedback from human instructors, and exposure to authentic language contexts can provide a more comprehensive and well-rounded evaluation of speaking skills. Besides, as stated by Fajri and Indah (2022), ESP teachers may face severe challenges in certain places with weak internet signals. Limited internet credit, poor internet networks, and improper gadgets or devices are among the internet problems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study has examined the strengths and limitations of artificial intelligence (AI) in assessing English language proficiency. The ongoing development of AI offers a potential path for redefining language proficiency testing, opening up a world of opportunities for scalable, unbiased, and adaptable evaluations. The potential impact of technology on language assessment must be considered as it develops further. Nevertheless, it is crucial to steer a balanced course between AI's benefits and drawbacks. Although AI-driven assessment tools have much potential, they are with difficulties. AI should be integrated carefully, making sure that its capabilities are used as a helpful tool for both language learning and evaluation. AI can enhance the process, but more is needed to fully replace the complex understanding and interpersonal interaction that people offer. The human aspect is still irreplaceable. The key is to deal with the challenges that arise while implementing AI. Even if difficult, problems like accent detection, contextual nuance, and a lack of emotional intelligence can be solved with continual improvement and adaptation. Scalability, consistency, and tailored learning pathways are just a few advantages AI offers that can help develop a more thorough and equitable method of evaluating English language competency.

In conclusion, a change in how we assess English language proficiency is possible by carefully balancing the potential of AI with its limits. We can pave the way for a time when AI acts as a catalyst for better language learning outcomes through intelligent applications and ongoing study. We set the groundwork for an improved, inclusive, and practical approach to evaluating English language competency by utilizing the benefits of AI while resolving its drawbacks.

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