Indonesian Learner's Perception of Using Fondi Application in Fostering Their English-Speaking Skill

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Abstract: English has become an important language to master in the era of globalization. Among the challenging skills in learning English, speaking is one of the most difficult skills to master. In today's era, the development of speaking skills is facilitated by technological advances. Despite this, students still face challenges in choosing the right technology to achieve their desired language proficiency. This research aims to explore user perceptions of the Fondi application as a platform for learning speaking skills. Participants in this research consisted of 34 Fondi application users. This research uses the Concurrent Embedded Strategy mix method methodology. In obtaining data, there were 2 techniques used in this research, namely through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire uses closed questions which function to ask the main/core questions. After that, interviews were conducted to confirm answers and obtain more detailed information. Next, the data is analyzed and processed using predetermined formula. Research findings show that users have a positive perception of the Fondi application, as many as 15 people (44.12%) fall into the 'very high' range and 19 people (around 55.88%) fall into the 'high' range. These results result in the conclusion that users generally have a good perception of the Fondi application. In addition to investigating user perceptions, this study contributes to the literature on the Fondi application, addressing an important gap in current research. For future research, this study suggests that next research should be followed up with effectiveness testing using an experimental model to measure how effective this application in improving learner's English ability accurately. Such testing would strengthen the findings presented in this article. Lastly, each variable asked can be discussed in more detail in further research. Future studies can use samples from a larger population so that they can be more representative.

Keywords: FONDI Application; Metaverse; Perception; Speaking

Abstrak: Bahasa Inggris telah menjadi bahasa yang penting untuk dikuasai di era globalisasi. Di antara keterampilan-keterampilan yang menantang dalam belajar bahasa Inggris, berbicara adalah salah satu keterampilan yang paling sulit untuk dikuasai. Di era sekarang ini, perkembangan keterampilan berbicara difasilitasi oleh kemajuan teknologi. Meskipun demikian, siswa masih menghadapi tantangan dalam memilih teknologi yang tepat untuk mencapai kemahiran bahasa yang mereka inginkan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi pengguna terhadap aplikasi Fondi sebagai platform pembelajaran keterampilan berbicara. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini terdiri dari 34 pengguna aplikasi Fondi. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi mix method Concurrent Embedded Strategy. Dalam memperoleh data, ada 2 teknik yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini, yaitu melalui angket dan wawancara. Kuesioner menggunakan pertanyaan tertutup yang berfungsi menanyakan pertanyaan utama/inti. Setelah itu dilakukan wawancara untuk mengkonfirmasi jawaban dan memperoleh informasi lebih rinci. Selanjutnya data dianalisis dan diolah dengan menggunakan rumus yang telah ditentukan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengguna memiliki persepsi positif terhadap aplikasi Fondi, sebanyak 15 orang (44,12%) masuk dalam rentang 'sangat tinggi' dan 19 orang (sekitar 55,88%) masuk dalam rentang 'tinggi'. Hasil tersebut menghasilkan kesimpulan bahwa pengguna secara umum memiliki persepsi yang baik terhadap aplikasi Fondi. Selain menyelidiki persepsi pengguna, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur tentang aplikasi Fondi, mengatasi kesenjangan penting dalam penelitian saat ini. penelitian ini menyarankan agar penelitian berikutnya ditindaklanjuti dengan uji efektivitas menggunakan model eksperimen untuk mengukur seberapa efektif aplikasi ini dalam meningkatkan kemampuan Bahasa inggris pembelajar secara lebih akurat. Pengujian semacam itu akan memperkuat temuan yang disajikan dalam artikel ini. Terakhir, setiap variabel yang ditanyakan dapat dibahas lebih detail pada penelitian selanjutnya. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat menggunakan sampel dari populasi yang lebih besar agar lebih representatif.

Kata kunci: Aplikasi FONDI; Metaverse; Persepsi; Berbicara

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, there are numerous expectations and demands placed on human resources. Globalization requires individuals to compete on a broad scale, not only at the national level but also on the international stage. To meet these demands, it is crucial for every individual to master an international language, namely English. English is considered a challenging language to learn, particularly in Indonesia, as the country positions English as a foreign language rather than the first language used in daily life (Mika & Mardiana, 2023). English is an international language that is deemed essential to be mastered today (Haidara, 2016). In various aspects of daily life, there is a significant demand for today's generation to be proficient in English, as it is a mandatory requirement in areas such as employment, education, and various other aspects. On the other hand, learning English is not an easy task. Language, as a complex tool of human communication, requires perseverance and patience in the learning process (Leong and Ahmadi 2017).

In the realm of English language learning, there are four essential skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Karademir & Gorgoz, 2019). Among these skills, speaking is considered one of the most crucial because every language learner aims to communicate effectively in the language (Rao, 2019). Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, and in the 21st century, learning speaking has become easier with the support of technology (Sri Lengkanawati & Wirza, 2021). In contrast to the past, where learners had to rely on manual methods like asking teachers and reading language dictionaries, technology plays a vital role not only within the classroom but also in extracurricular learning (Ahmadi, 2018). Besides meeting the demands of the 21st century, the use of technology facilitates the learning process, contributing to the joy of students and engaging them in different learning methods (Aryana et al., 2022).

However, the reality in the field indicates that English language proficiency remains a serious issue for Indonesian learners. In fact, a significant number of learners face challenges in achieving fluency in English, even after spending 11-12 years in primary school (binti Talib et al., 2019). One factor contributing to the difficulty in mastering English for Indonesian learners is the lack of literacy in Indonesian society. According to a 2021 study, Indonesia is in a literacy emergency (*Kondisi Literasi Indonesia Yang Sedang Tidak Baik-Baik Saja | Badan Pengembangan Dan Pembinaan Bahasa - Kemendikbudristek*, n.d.). This situation significantly influences the English language learning process, involving activities such as reading, memorization, and various other learning activities. In addition to literacy factors, another challenging aspect for Indonesian learners in mastering English is the lack of a supportive learning environment (Mohammed, 2018). This factor is crucial, as effective practice and learning occur when individuals have a conducive and supportive learning environment.

Given this reality, there is a need for a serious approach, especially in the era of technology that facilitates various activities, including English language learning. This raises a question and reflection on what might be wrong with technology-based learning today. The selection of the right technology becomes a key factor that needs attention, considering that the learning process is not a brief one (Parveen, 2016). This is supported by statements emphasizing that in technology-based learning, learners must be able to find the right technology to achieve effective learning processes (Ahmadi, 2018). Other research also asserts that one crucial aspect of successful learning is choosing effective learning models and media (Djiwandono, 2021). There is a great hope that the precise selection of technology for use can encourage and address the existing gaps in the field.

This study aims to investigate users' perceptions of the English language learning application currently going viral, namely Fondi. Fondi is an application for learning to speak a foreign language, where students can communicate with people from different countries and languages, communicating on Fondi using a character or avatar that can be run to meet and talk virtually with many people from the various places have been provided by Fondi apps(Riska Amalia, 2023).

Preliminary research has been conducted through observation and interviews to gather initial insights from users of the application. In the preliminary study, some users have stated that Fondi can provide a good English language environment with comprehensive features. While there are other similar applications such as Discord, Halo, and others, Fondi stands out for its features such as Plaza, accessibility in hundreds of countries, metaverse, and artificial intelligence. These statements were obtained through brief observations and interviews and will be further discussed in this study. Based on the explanations, users' perceptions of Fondi as an English language learning application are interesting to be researched. Moreover, there is limited previous research on this application.

The results of this study are expected to reveal user perception in Indonesia, regarding Fondi through various discussion points such as user comfort, user confidence, user improvement, user preference and related to the features offered by Fondi itself. Additionally, the contribution of this research is expected to provide new insights into the science of using learning applications and serve as a solution to address existing gaps.

Fondi Application

The Fondi application is a relatively new application that provides a platform for learning English for people worldwide. This application was founded by Tatsuto Nohara, a young man from Japan born on July 7, 1996. According to information from the Fondi website, Tatsuto was raised in the city of Tsukuba, Japan. After completing his secondary education, he entered the University of Warwick Faculty of Management. In 2017, he took a leave of absence and started his career by establishing Fondi Co., Ltd (*Fondi: Talk in a Virtual Space - Apps on Google Play*, n.d.).

The application was released on the Google Play Store on October 6, 2019, but it only gained popularity among learners from Indonesia around the past year, 2021. Until now, the application has been downloaded by more than 500,000 people worldwide. The application is intended to provide a platform for learning English, as indicated by its name in the Google Play Store, "Fondi: English Practice Online."

The application's description outlines several features that characterize the Fondi application (*Fondi: Talk in a Virtual Space - Apps on Google Play*, n.d.):
1. Don't worry about mistakes – it's part of the process. Fondi users can engage using avatars without showing their faces, a feature claimed to boost user confidence in conversation.
2. Fondi is used by users from more than 100 countries worldwide. Anyone using this application can find conversation partners from their own country or abroad.
3. Metaverse Feature. Metaverse is the collaboration, combination, or merging of the physical world with the digital world through various technologies and programs (Park & Kim, 2022). Fondi features a metaverse with human-like avatars that can move around a plaza to find conversation partners. The plaza is one of the chat rooms in Fondi, providing an atmosphere similar to the real world.
4. AI Instructor Technology. Fondi offers users the opportunity for regular conversation with an AI instructor using the latest artificial intelligence technology. Even if you struggle with English or feel shy, you can freely speak to the AI instructor without worrying about mistakes. With the AI instructor, anyone can gain an essential aspect of English conversation using their own words.

METHOD

This study employs Concurrent Embedded Strategy mix method where combining the use of methods simultaneous quantitative and qualitative research/together (or vice versa), but weight the method is different(Hadju & Aulia, 2022). In this model there is a method the primary and secondary method. Primary method is used to obtain data primary, and secondary methods are

used for obtaining data to support the data obtained from the primary method. Quantitative methods are utilized in the data collection process through a questionnaire, while qualitative methods are employed to elaborate on responses gathered through interviews.

Data collection involves two stages: the questionnaire and the interview. The participants are users of the Fondi application from Indonesia. In the first stage, data is collected online through a questionnaire administered to 34 Fondi users in Indonesia. The questions in the questionnaire use close-ended questions, allowing only 'YES' or 'NO' responses as core information. The second stage involves interviews designed to confirm and gain a deeper understanding of the questionnaire responses. Interview participants are randomly selected using the random sampling method. Due to respondents' diverse locations, interviews are conducted online via Voice notes on Instagram. This research uses a special formula to process the data obtained. In more detail the formula used is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Propensity Formula

Score Range	Category
$x > (\bar{x} + 1{,}8\,SBi)$	Very High
$(\bar{x} + 1{,}8\,SBi) < x \leq (\bar{x} + 0{,}6\,SBi)$	High
$(\bar{x} + 0{,}6\,SBi) < x \leq (\bar{x} - 0{,}6\,SBi)$	Enough
$(\bar{x} - 0{,}6\,SBi) < x \leq (\bar{x} - 1{,}8\,SBi)$	Low
$x \leq (\bar{x} - 1{,}8\,SBi)$	Very Low

Information
$\bar{x}$: Average ideal score
SBi : Ideal standard deviation (1/6 (maximum score – minimum score)
X : score achieved
(Mardapi, 2008)

Each closed-ended question is scored as 1 point when answered with "YES." Therefore, if all questions are answered with "YES," each respondent will have a total of 8 points, as there are a total of 8 questions. After obtaining the points, the next step is to adjust them according to the categories in the above formula.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data in this section was obtained from questionnaires and interviews as explained in the methods section. Then, the research data will be formulated based on data processed using the formula listed in table 1. The formula that has been adapted to research needs will be presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Adjusted Formula

Score Range	Category
$> 6{,}34$	Very High
$6{,}34 < x \leq 4{,}78$	High
$4{,}78 < x \leq 3{,}22$	Enough
$3{,}22 < x \leq 1{,}66$	Low
$< 1{,}66$	Very Low

In the table 2, there are criteria that are used as measuring tools in processing data. These criteria are an initial formula that has been adjusted to the amount of data obtained. There are 8 core questions in this research, where all questions show a maximum total score of 8 points by each respondent. This is obtained because each question has one point when it gets a YES response, according to the explanation in the method section. From all respondents, points earned will be classified based on the range achieved by each respondent. While table 3 shows the results of the study taken from data calculations using a formula that has been adapted to research needs as shown in table 2.

Table 3. Result of Study

Category	Number of Respondents	Precentage
Very High	15	44,12%
High	19	55,88%
Enough	-	-
Low	-	-
Very Low	-	-
Total	34	100%

After being calculated using a formula and classified, result of study shows that there are 15 respondents or around 44% fell into the very high category. Meanwhile, 19 respondents or around 55.88% were in the high category. Based on the table of findings above, it can be seen that Fondi users have a positive perception of the Fondi application. This can be observed based on the respondents' responses regarding the questions asked. The perception questions asked of respondents were related to user comfort, user confidence, user improvement, user preference and related to the features offered by Fondi itself.

User Comfort in Using Fondi

To find out users' perceptions regarding their comfort in using the Fondi application, there is one question asked in this discussion *"Do you enjoy using Fondi?"* The question aims to explore user perceptions based on their experience in using the Fondi application. This question is asked in the form of a close-ended question which will only be answered through YES and NO answers.
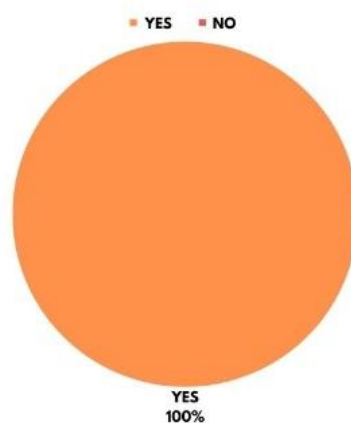

Chart 1. Do you enjoy using Fondi?

The results of the questionnaire stated that 34 respondents or 100% answered with the answer enjoy or YES. From these results, it can be concluded that all Fondi users enjoy learning using this application. This is also supported by research which states that Fondi users feel happy and enjoy using Fondi because of the features it offers (Arifiyana, 2023). In this research, it was also stated that applications that provide many features will make students interested in using them.

From the conclusion above, the Fondi application can be categorized as a good application in meeting the needs of the learning process. Comfort can make students more motivated to learn. This conclusion is drawn from the statement which states that learning requires a good cycle to support arousing desire, providing motivational encouragement and stimulation in learning activities (Mustikawati, 2019).

To find out more clearly about the respondents' answers above, one respondent was taken at random to be interviewed online via Instagram chat. The respondent used as sampling was Nisaul Mukaromah who is a student at the Kiai Haji Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan State Islamic University. He has been using Fondi since 8 months ago until now. Nisa's answer to the question about what makes her feel comfortable using the Fondi application is:

"I feel comfortable using Fondi because the people in it are very supportive, when I make a mistake, they don't mock my abilities, in fact they help me and give me lots of advice. Secondly, I can make lots of friends in it, so when I chat, I can continue to chat. Then the final reason is because Fondi has good features and is not monotonous. Obviously that kind of learning environment makes me comfortable in it."

User Confidence

This point has even been emphasized by the owner of the Fondi application in the description which can be read on the Google Play Store. In the description it is written that Fondi users can use an artificial avatar without having to show their face. This feature is said to increase the user's confidence in carrying out conversations. To find out users' perceptions regarding their confidence in using the Fondi application, there is one question asked in this discussion *"Do you feel more confident in conveying your ideas in the Fondi application?"* This was asked of respondents in the form of a close-ended question.
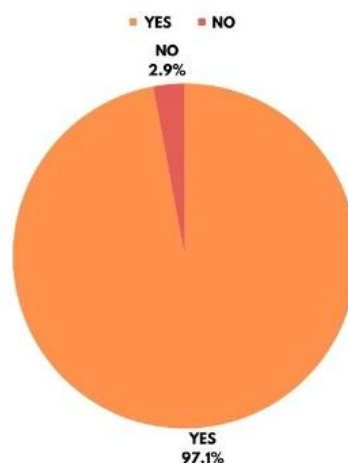

Chart 2. Do you feel more confident in conveying your ideas in the Fondi application?

From 34 respondents, 33 of the totals or around 97.1% said they were more confident when conveying ideas using the Fondi application. The remaining 1 or around 2.9% said they were no more confident. Nisa's statement in answering this question:

"I feel more confident in speaking English since using the Fondi app because I don't have to show my face, at the same time I have become accustomed to speaking."

The Fondi application can be a solution to the problem of self-confidence in speaking English. The results of research say that one of the factors that hinders learning English, especially in speaking, is the fear of making mistakes when speaking (Nety & Nurhaeni, 2020). With the data above, it can be concluded that the use of the Fondi application is able to increase individual confidence in speaking English. Of course, through one of its feature offerings where users don't need to show their faces and are accompanied by other users who are quite supportive of each other. Alternatives to self-confidence problems are indeed a consideration in choosing learning methods and strategies. Hanton and Hall in their study revealed that self-confidence affects a person's performance, low self-confidence will lead to poor performance.

User Improvement

To find out users' perceptions regarding this discussion, there is one question asked, "*After using the application for some time, do you feel that your English skills have improved?*" The result of this question is the same as the answer to the first question where the question was asked via a close-ended question.
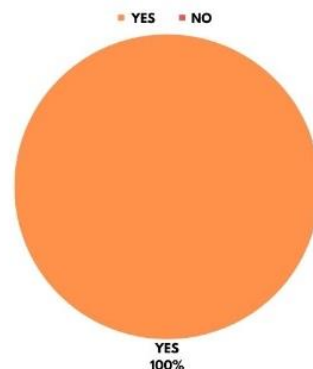

Chart 3. After using the application for some time, do you feel that your English skills have improved?

The results of the questionnaire stated that 34 respondents or 100% answered YES. Nisa's answer in answering the improvement progress felt after using the Fondi application:

"I feel quite good progress in myself, today I can compose sentences and convey my ideas well. In contrast to myself before using Fondi, I had difficulty constructing sentences, and even had difficulty remembering vocabulary, obviously because I didn't do much practice. I rarely practice because there is no platform to support me, but since Fondi has existed, I can practice speaking English whenever I want, and I am much more confident in practicing speaking. Many people say I must do a lot of practice to be able to speak English fluently."

This is in line with the statement which states that practice is the best way to develop an individual's ability to learn a foreign language(Styfanyshyn & Kalymon, 2020). The more practice one does, the better one's ability to speak English will be.

User Preference

This discussion aims to find out user perceptions regarding their preference in talking, whether it is more comfortable to talk to fellow Indonesians or to people from other countries. The question asked *is "Do you like to talk with Indonesian users than foreigner?"*
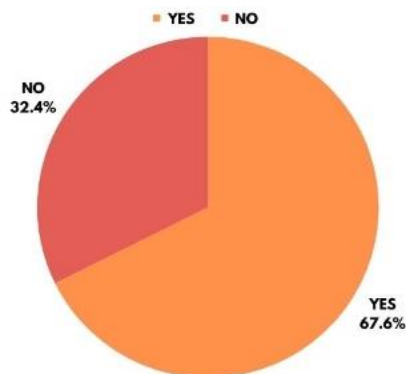

Chart 4. Do you like to talk with Indonesian users than foreigner?

Of the total respondents, 23 respondents or around 67.6% answered that they were more comfortable talking to fellow Indonesian users. The remaining 11 respondents or around 32.4% were more comfortable talking to people from abroad. Nisaul's answer when asked about this:

"I tend to be more comfortable talking to users from Indonesia, it's easier to build chemistry with each other. Different from foreigners here, some of them are quite annoying and can't follow the flow of the conversation well. Only some of them, not all of them. There are also many foreigners who are kind and supportive.

Fondi Features

In discussing the Fondi features, 5 questions were asked to determine user perceptions of the features offered. The first question is about the Avatar Feature, "*Do you like the avatar feature in Fondi?*"
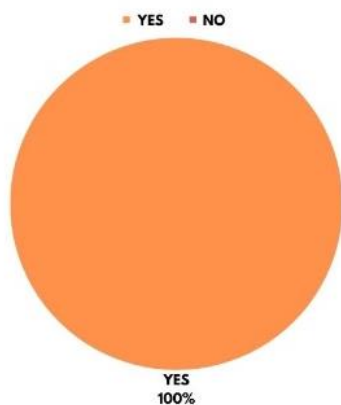

Chart 5. After using the application for some time, do you feel that your English skills have improved?

The question above is a close-ended question. The result shows 34 respondents or around 100% answered YES. From these answers, you can of course conclude that the avatar feature is one of the factors that users like the Fondi application. On the other hand, using an avatar without having to show your face can make users more confident in speaking English. Nisaul's response regarding the first feature:

"It's different from other applications because in Fondi we use avatars, so we only focus on making friends without thinking about our faces or anything and of course it makes me more confident."

This answer shows that it is in accordance with the offers offered by the Fondi application itself. Fondi's offer is also in line with the results of literature which states that online learning without showing one's face can reduce anxiety levels compared to face-to-face learning (Broeckelman-Post et al., 2019). With features that can be a solution to self-confidence problems, the Fondi application certainly has a plus because not all applications are able to present this to their users. This point of self-confidence has also been supported by the discussion of trust in the previous discussion.

Next, the second question is about the second feature, you can make friends from all over the world because this application is used by more than 100 user countries throughout the world. The question is, *"Can you meet people from other countries according to the features that Fondi offers?"*
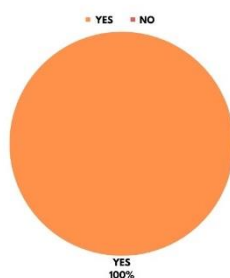

Chart 6. Can you meet people from other countries according to the features that Fondi offers?

In the close-ended question there were 34 people or around 100% who affirmed the existence of this feature. Based on personal experience, it is easy to find friends on this application, especially if the user wants to have friends from abroad. This is also supported by psychological research that some Indonesians have a special attraction to foreigners (Hartika et al., 2022). That is why many Indonesians want to have friends from abroad. However, in a learning context, talking to foreigners also encourages more self-confidence because they don't care too much about language grammar.

Next, the third question in discussing features is about metaverse feature. As stated in the discussion above, the metaverse is a combination of a virtual and reality cycle. Metaverse is based on technology that enables multisensory interactions with virtual environments, digital objects and humans (Mystakidis, 2022). The question asked to respondents is *"Do you like the Metaverse feature in Fondi?"*
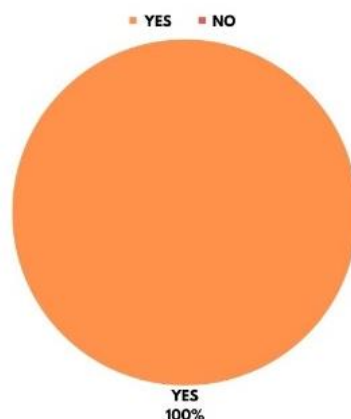
Chart 7. Do you like the Metaverse feature in Fondi?

In the close-ended question, there were 34 respondents or around 100% who answered YES. This shows that the metaverse feature is also one of the reasons why users like the Fondi application. This was also conveyed by Nisaul in his interview:

"This is the core point that differentiates Fondi from other applications. Discord, Halo and other similar apps may provide space for conversation, but they don't have the tangible visuals that Fondi does. In my opinion, this visual factor is one of the biggest reasons why users are comfortable using the Fondi application."

When using Fondi, users can create avatars according to their taste. The tastes in question include hair style, clothes, shoes, face shape and so on. The avatar is like an artificial human, it can walk, run and sit. Likewise, the environment in Fondi depicts the reality that exists in real life. There are trees, chairs, tables, doors and so on. Fondi also has different chat places, there is a Plaza, a Park and a lounge so users can choose which place they like the most. Apart from providing convenience, it turns out that several studies have stated that the presence of Metaverse technology can increase the effectiveness of a learning process (Kim & Kim, 2023).

The last one is a discussion of the Artificial Intelligence feature. Artificial Intelligence is technology created to help daily human activities. AI can also be interpreted as a development of a computer system that can carry out tasks that usually involve human intelligence so that it is able to carry out things that are generally done by humans themselves (Rukiati et al., 2023). When someone doesn't feel confident to talk directly to humans, the Fondi application provides an alternative by having this instructor as a training partner. Users can take advantage of this feature without having to worry about making mistakes in speaking. The question that asked in this discussion is *"Do you like the Artificial Intelligence features offered by Fondi?"*
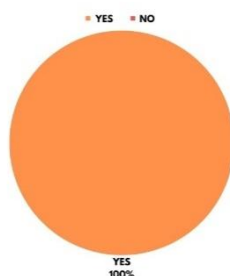

Chart 8. Do you like the Artificial Intelligence feature in Fondi?

In the close-ended question, only around 15 respondents answered YES. The remaining 19 respondents or around 55.88% of all respondents answered with the answer NO. This is also supported by Nisaul's statement in an interview:

"I don't really like this feature because I personally have never used it. I feel that talking with other humans will be more comfortable than with machines."

Based on personal experience in using the Fondi application, this feature is true, but according to Nisa's statement, this feature is rarely used. This is because many people are more interested in talking directly with other users.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

English is an essential language to master in the era of globalization. With the advent of technology, learning activities have become more accessible. However, the diverse presence of technology poses a challenge for users to choose the right tools for effective learning. Addressing this issue, this research aims to examine and present an application that is particularly effective in the process of learning English, especially speaking skill, Fondi application. In exploring user perceptions, several core questions were posed to respondents. In addition to the core questions, supplementary information was gathered through interviews. The conclusion drawn from this research is that all respondents provided positive perceptions of the Fondi application. This is evidenced by the overall positioning of respondents within the established range formula. Specifically, 15 respondents fell within the "very high" range, and 19 respondents fell within the "high" range. Beyond understanding user perceptions, this research also contributes to the existing literature on Fondi, as there is a limited body of work discussing this application. This aligns with the research's introductory goals.

On the other hand, for further enhancement, it is recommended that this research should be followed up with effectiveness testing using an experimental model to measure how effective this application in improving learner's english ability accurately. Such testing would strengthen the findings presented in this article. Lastly, as suggestion, each variable asked can be discussed in more detail in further research. Future studies can use samples from a larger population so that they can be more representative.

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