

Students' Perception on the Use of ELSA Speak Application in Pronunciation

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate Indonesian EFL learners' perceptions of using the ELSA Speak application for pronunciation learning. This study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate students' perceptions of using the ELSA Speak application in pronunciation learning. The data of the study were collected through semi-structured interviews with second-semester English Education students at a university in Indonesia. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study reveal that students perceive ELSA Speak as a highly beneficial tool for improving pronunciation skills. Students perceived ELSA Speak positively because it provides immediate corrective feedback, is easy to use, and supports pronunciation practice. However, ELSA Speak also presents several challenges, including internet connectivity issues and initial difficulty in navigating and understanding the application interface. These results align with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), emphasizing the app's perceived usefulness and ease of use. The research contributes to the discourse on technology-enhanced language learning by validating ELSA Speak's efficacy while identifying areas for improvement, such as accessibility and interactivity. In brief, Indonesian EFL learners perceived ELSA Speak as an alternative tool for teaching and learning pronunciation.

Keywords: *EFL learners; ELSA Speak; Pronunciation Instruction.*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a critical component of language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where accurate pronunciation ensures effective communication and reduces misunderstandings (Haryanti & Febriani, 2022). Pronunciation is considered to be one of the most difficult parts of learning a language, as it is an essential skill in communication. The ability to pronounce words correctly is even more important for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, as it affects their ability to communicate effectively (Sholekhah & Fakhrurriana, 2023). Since English is a foreign language in Indonesia, many learners find it difficult to speak, particularly because English pronunciation differs from that of their native language. Therefore, pronunciation proficiency is crucial in language learning. (Akhmad & Munawir, 2022). One of the micro skills English speakers need to master is the ability to pronounce words correctly. Wulandari et al. (2022) assert that English pronunciation involves the use of segmental and suprasegmental features in spoken communication. Vowels, diphthongs, and consonants are examples of segmental features in English. Stress and intonation are examples of suprasegmental characteristics. However, mastering pronunciation remains a significant challenge for many learners due to its complexity and the limited time available for focused instruction in classroom settings (Srakaew, 2021). Traditional teaching methods often fall short in providing individualized feedback, which is essential

for correcting pronunciation errors and fostering confidence in speaking. This empirical problem underscores the need for innovative solutions, such as technology-assisted learning tools, to bridge the gap in pronunciation instruction.

Recent studies have explored the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based applications to enhance pronunciation learning. For instance, ELSA Speak, an AI-powered language learning app, has been shown to improve students' pronunciation skills by providing instant and personalized feedback (Yosintha & Rekha, 2022). Research by Alsuhaibani et al. (2024) highlights the effectiveness of web-based pronunciation training, particularly through repetitive practice and high-variability exposure to phonetic patterns. Similarly, Kholis (2021) emphasizes the role of ELSA Speak in offering interactive and engaging learning experiences, which are crucial for sustaining student motivation. ELSA Speak is considered a useful tool for language learning, particularly for English pronunciation practice. It was founded in 2015 by Vu Van in San Francisco (Kholis, 2021). This app helps users get better at pronouncing words correctly. With its deep learning engine, automated feedback, and in-house speech recognition, ELSA Speak has the potential to be an excellent online pronunciation learning tool. According to Yosintha & Rekha (2022), ELSA Speak may effectively improve students' pronunciation skills by engaging them in the learning process. In pronunciation learning, English learners need a platform or application that encourages them to practice words and sentences. It can facilitate English learners to improve their skills, especially in speaking (Nabilah et al., 2024). Further, one of the key aspects of getting better speaking skills is pronunciation. ELSA Speak app provides a wide range of activities including a variety of topics, skills, levels, and other features. Users with a connection to the internet can use this application to learn anywhere and at any time they want. They can also practice pronouncing words, sentences, or conversations, listen to models, and record their own pronunciation. Afterward, they can receive instant feedback on pronunciation errors, specific suggestions for improvement, and progress reports after a period of practice (Pham & Pham, 2025). Despite these advancements, existing studies often focus on quantitative outcomes, such as test scores, while neglecting qualitative insights into students' perceptions and experiences with such technologies. Additionally, many studies are conducted in offline settings, leaving a gap in understanding the app's efficacy in online learning environments.

The limitations of recent studies reveal a critical gap: while the technological capabilities of tools like ELSA Speak are well-documented, there is insufficient information on how students perceive these tools and how such perceptions influence their learning outcomes. Furthermore, cultural and contextual factors, such as the readiness of students to adopt AI-based learning, remain underexamined. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating students' perceptions of ELSA Speak in an EFL classroom, focusing on its Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) as outlined in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989).

The primary research question guiding this study is: What are students' perceptions of the use of the ELSA Speak app in learning English pronunciation? The novelty of this research lies in its focus on technology-assisted English pronunciation learning, which remains underexplored in EFL classroom settings. The study offers insights that can inform the design of more effective and user-centered language learning technologies. By addressing these aspects, this study contributes to the broader discourse on technology-enhanced language education and its potential to transform pronunciation learning in the digital era.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of second-semester English Education students at a university in Indonesia regarding the use of the ELSA Speak application for pronunciation learning. The study employs semi-structured interviews to obtain students' perceptions of the ELSA Speak application. Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) served as the theoretical framework, focusing on perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU). The participants were second-semester English Education students at a university in Indonesia who used the ELSA Speak application to learn English pronunciation. The research was conducted in a higher education context and involved nine voluntary participants. These students were selected because they actively used the ELSA Speak App as part of their learning process.

The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews designed to explore students' perceptions of the ELSA Speak application. A semi-structured interview was conducted, adapted from Akriono & Isnaini (2024), focusing on Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU). These open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, providing in-depth responses that were later transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the perceptions of second-semester English Education students regarding the use of the ELSA Speak application in English pronunciation. Based on the data obtained from interviews, the following results for learning emerged regarding students' perceptions of using the ELSA Speak application for learning English pronunciation. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which focuses on perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU), was used to guide data categorization. The data were then analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Results

The results of the study are then classified into two major categories.

1. Perceived Usefulness (PU) of the ELSA Speak Application

Perceived Usefulness refers to the degree to which students believe that using ELSA Speak enhances their English pronunciation learning performance. The interviews showed that participants found the application useful across several subthemes: improving pronunciation skills, providing constructive feedback, assisting autonomous study, and the importance of technology in language learning.

a. Improve English Pronunciation Skills

Based on the data obtained from the interview, most participants reported a noticeable improvement in their English pronunciation skills after using the ELSA Speak application. All participants perceived the ELSA Speak application as beneficial for enhancing their English pronunciation ability.

First, S#1 acknowledges that the improvement was gradual but meaningful, just like I study elsewhere, but when I study using this ELSA Speak application, I feel a significant improvement especially in English pronunciation."

In line with S#1, S#2 claimed that, “Very much improved, by using this ELSA Speak application to learn English pronunciation, I can distinguish the pronunciation between /p/ and /v/ sounds.” In addition, S#3 “Of course, it does, it really can improve my English pronunciation, besides that I can also choose other accents to know the difference between several accents so that I can know what the pronunciation is like and is easy to understand and of course it can improve my English pronunciation.”

At last, S#4 emphasized, “Yes of course, because if I use this ELSA Speak application consistently it can help improve my English pronunciation skills, beside that this application also provides a lot of features or topics that I want to learn and can also chat with the AI in this application. So, I think this application is very helpful to improve my English pronunciation skills.”

The data indicate that students’ English pronunciation improved after using the ELSA Speak application. The application’s ability to detect errors and provide detailed explanations contributes to better pronunciation. These findings align with Kholis (2021), who suggests that ELSA Speak helps students pronounce words correctly through features such as instant feedback.

a. Provide Constructive Feedback

Participants consistently praised the utility of immediate feedback in correcting errors. S#2 affirms that ELSA Speak Application is very effective and very helpful in learning English pronunciation using the ELSA Speak application because in this application I can know where the pronunciation mistakes are given feedback by the application so that I can correct my previous pronunciation mistakes. Moreover, S#5 shared, “I think it is very effective because I can know where my mistakes are and also be told what the correct pronunciation is like. That way I can easily correct my English pronunciation.” Further, S#3 stated, “I think the ELSA Speak application is very helpful where there is a mispronunciation and later an explanation is given regarding where the mistakes is and the feedback given is very helpful for me in learning English pronunciation.” Lastly, S#1 argues, “It is easier to understand when I have a mispronunciation in English, this application provides feedback when I mispronunciation, so I know what the correct pronunciation is and it makes it easier for me to learn English pronunciation.”

The findings deal with feedback mechanism, powered by speech recognition technology, is crucial for identifying and correcting errors, supporting Akriono & Isnaini (2024) view on technological advancements in pronunciation improvement. Sholekhah & Fakhurririana (2023) further support this by noting ELSA Speak customized suggestions based on individual pronunciation issues.

b. ELSA Speak Application assists students’ English Pronunciation

Participants generally perceived the ELSA Speak application as highly effective. S#8 stated, “I think it is quite effective and very helpful in learning English, especially in learning English pronunciation.” S#2 said, “In my opinion it is very effective and very helpful, because I can know more about what is wrong and what is right when pronouncing words in English and I know where the mistake is so I can correct the word.” S#4 noted, “Very effective because this application provides complete features and if we consistently use the application, it will really help to learn English pronunciation.” S#9 added, “I think it is quite effective and very helpful, because we can also study at home and if we are alone, it can be more effective in learning by using this ELSA Speak application.”

The app's ability to monitor progress, offer personalized learning paths, and provide speech recognition and feedback contributes to its effectiveness. This aligns with Fitrah & Rahmaniah (2024), who found overall student satisfaction with ELSA Speak as a pronunciation tool.

c. The Importance of Using Technology in Learning English Pronunciation

Students strongly emphasized the importance of technology, like ELSA Speak, in modern English pronunciation learning. S#1 stated, "I think it is very important to utilize technology in this era, now there is an ELSA Speak application or other applications to learn English because learning from the ELSA Speak application can also be if you just want to be able to learn English. So, it's really important and we also have to keep up with technology." S#8 said, "I think it is very important because technology like this can help people who have difficulty in understanding English lessons so this application can be used to learn English pronunciation independently." S#3 highlighted, "I think the ELSA Speak application it's very important because it's very useful for us especially, we are students in English Department. ELSA Speak application has many choices of topics that we want to learn and can also chat with the AI directly. So, this is very important and very useful for me." S#7 concluded, "Very important because this application is very useful for beginners and of course can improve English pronunciation."

This perception is consistent with the rapid expansion of AI and IoT in the industrial revolution 4.0, where AI tools like ELSA Speak are seen as beneficial for correcting second language errors, as discussed by (Kholis, 2021).

2. *Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) of the ELSA Speak Application*

Perceived Ease of Use examines how user-friendly and effortless students found the application to operate. The result indicated a mixed perception: the core features are highly accessible, but technical and financial constraints act as barriers that lower the overall ease of use.

a. Ease of Using the ELSA Speak Application to Learn English Pronunciation

The participants found the application very easy to use due to its comprehensive features. Regarding with the easiness of using ELSA Speak Application to Learn English Pronunciation. The data obtained from interviews are presented as follows: S#3 said, "I think it is very easy because we can choose the topic we want to learn, for example I want to learn about music, well later in the application there is that topic. Then there is also AI that helps me learn about the topic I choose." S#4 simply stated, "Very easy because the features provided in this application are very complete." In addition, S#6 confirms, "Yes of course, so if for example the reading or pronunciation is wrong, the meaning must also be wrong, well this ELSA Speak application is very easy to use and really helps when I learn English pronunciation." S#7 commented "I think it is very easy to learn English pronunciation especially if we use the application consistently."

The data above indicates that all the participants claim that ELSA Speak Application is easy to be used in learning English pronunciation. Moreover, various topics and corrections are provided on it. Therefore, coupled with instant correction and feedback, makes ELSA Speak an ideal tool for pronunciation learning (Kholis, 2021).

b. Participants' Challenges in Using ELSA Speak Application

Students reported experiencing some problems, primarily related to the app's premium features and initial navigation. S#2 noted, "Confusion was only at the beginning,

at first I didn't know where to take the test, then finally I knew enough because I often open the application and can know where to look for features or learning topics." S#3 stated, "The only problem is that I didn't buy premium, so the features or topics that I want to learn are locked." S#6 echoed, "The only problem is the premium because we have to pay first so the features are very limited." S#7 added, "Yes, I often feel confused because I don't know where to look at the features."

These challenges include a limited free trial, reluctance to pay to premium features, and initial difficulty understanding the app's interface. Fitrah & Rahmaniah (2024) also point out the need for a strong internet connection and issues with audio playback, which can lead to repeated attempts at pronunciation.

Discussion

This study investigates the perceptions of second-semester English Education students regarding the ELSA Speak app in English pronunciation. The findings of the study highlight the usefulness of ELSA Speak application in pronunciation learning, particularly in enhancing specific pronunciation skills such as distinguishing between minimal pairs like /p/ and /v/. This improvement is largely attributed to the app's ability to detect errors and provide in-depth explanations, aligning with the statement by Kholis (2021) that ELSA Speak instant feedback directly helps with correct pronunciation. These findings are further supported by Akriono & Isnaini (2024), who views technological advancements in speech recognition as a key milestone in enabling the precise identification of errors that are often missed in traditional classroom settings. Regarding English pronunciation, ELSA Speak is often used to improve pronunciation skills (Kholis, 2021).

In addition, the constructive feedback and personalized suggestions provided by this app are highly praised for helping students identify and correct their errors. This strengthens the effectiveness of automated feedback systems as noted by Sholekhah & Fakhurriana (2023), who support the theory that timely and specific feedback is crucial for errors correction in language learning. However, a more critical perspective is offered by Yu et al. (2022), who argue that while AI-based tools are excellent for focused phonetic practice, they often struggle to provide the social interaction necessary for genuine communicative competence. This suggests that while students consider the tool effective for individual mechanisms, it may not yet fully replace the interactive nuances of human-led instruction.

Moreover, the ease of use of the ELSA Speak app also emerged as a key theme, with students finding the user-friendly interface highly supportive of the learning process. This perception aligns with Davis (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which states that perceived ease of use is a primary driver in the adoption of new technologies. This is consistent with the findings of Fitrah & Rahmaniah (2024), who reported high levels of student satisfaction regarding the utility of mobile apps in pronunciation training. Students view this app as an essential tool in the digital era, reflecting the broader expansion of Artificial Intelligence in education.

At last, despite ELSA Speak app has several usefulness and ease of use in pronunciation learning. This study identifies several challenges, particularly regarding the locked nature of premium features and technical dependencies. Participants reported that locked content was a barrier to their learning progress. This practical limitation is supported by Fitrah & Rahmaniah (2024), who emphasized that the effectiveness of such tools is often hindered by internet instability and financial constraints. Additionally, some students

expressed doubts about the real-world application of this app beyond the digital interface. This aligns with the concerns of Wei (2022), who noted that technology-based education requires a high level of autonomy and motivation from learners, which is difficult to sustain without external pedagogical integration.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that Indonesian EFL learners demonstrate a highly positive perception and strong acceptance of the ELSA Speak application for pronunciation learning, structurally aligning with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The application's high acceptance is heavily driven by its Perceived Usefulness (PU), specifically its immediate corrective feedback, progress tracking capabilities, and deep phonological error detection that drastically improve students' pronunciation accuracy and speaking confidence. The application's key strengths - its immediate corrective feedback system, user-friendly interface, and diverse learning features - significantly enhance students' pronunciation accuracy and speaking confidence, aligning with previous research on technology-assisted language learning. In addition, Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) of this app is supported by a user-friendly and feature-rich interface. This interface enables flexible and independent practice. Practical limitations such as financial barriers at the premium level, initial confusion with the layout, and a strong need for a stable internet connection make the app more difficult to use at first. However, these factors do not significantly reduce students' positive attitudes toward the app. Therefore, rather than viewing this software merely as an isolated "effective tool", students perceive it as an essential and highly useful digital asset within the modern language learning landscape.

Future studies could explore longitudinal effects of app usage or compare ELSA Speak with alternative pronunciation tools. The research findings suggest that with continued refinement addressing current limitations, ELSA Speak and similar applications have significant potential to transform pronunciation instruction in the digital era.

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