

## EFL Student Experiences with ELSA Speaking Application to Learn Pronunciation

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### Abstract

This study investigates the experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students using the ELSA Speak application to enhance their pronunciation skills. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with 14 second-semester students from the English Education program at Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe. The findings reveal that the ELSA Speak application is an effective tool for improving pronunciation, with approximately 80% of respondents expressing satisfaction and enjoyment in using the app. Students reported significant increases in confidence, rating their pronunciation progress between 8 and 9.5 out of 10. The application's interactive features and instant feedback were highlighted as key factors contributing to its effectiveness. However, challenges such as difficulties in voice detection and minor technical issues were noted, indicating limitations in automatic speech recognition technology. Overall, the study confirms the positive impact of the ELSA Speak application on EFL students' pronunciation skills and emphasizes its potential as a valuable resource in language education. Future research is recommended to explore the application's effectiveness across different educational levels and its integration into formal curricula.

*Keywords:* ELSA Speak Application; EFL Students; English Pronunciation; Qualitative Research; Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR); Language Learning Technology; Pronunciation Improvement; Interactive Learning Too; Student Confidence; Educational Resource

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### 1. Introduction

English pronunciation is a basic skill that is very important in developing speaking, listening, and speaking English skills (Anggraini, 2022). Pronunciation is crucial for effective communication, as errors in pronunciation can lead to misunderstandings of the message by the recipient. The pronunciation of letter sounds in words, as well as the emphasis on syllables in parts of words, will often permanently change the meaning and context of words (Kobilova, 2022). One of the main difficulties

is that English pronunciation is quite complex because there are many sounds, diphthongs, and intonation patterns that may not be familiar to non-native speakers (Utami & Lintang Sari, 2021). According to Prashant (2018), accurate pronunciation and comprehension of words are essential for effective communication. Good pronunciation can greatly contribute to leaving a good first impression. Correct pronunciation is the foundation for efficient communication in English. One of these programs is the ELSA Speak App, an advanced software that allows students, through personalized training, to improve their speaking skills in terms of pronunciation, namely the correct articulation and production of vowels and consonants, accurate word stress, sentence stress, and intonation (Nasikanan, 2023). ELSA can be utilized as a learning aid, particularly if speaking skills are the main focus (Kholid, 2021; Hanna, 2022; Octavianita, 2022). The use of AI technology in the ELSA Speak application is considered quite effective and very helpful in improving English speaking skills, especially in pronunciation (Widyasari & Maghfiroh, 2023). ELSA Speak can help students to practice and hone their speaking skills in English by correcting incorrect pronunciation and explaining how to pronounce correctly in English (Akhmad & Munawir, 2022).

There have been several previous studies on the topic of teaching speaking using the ELSA Speak application. For instance, Darsih et al. (2021) examined the ELSA Speak application in a speaking class during Covid-19. The study attempted to improve the English pronunciation of college students at Nahdlatul Ulama University Yogyakarta by using the English Language Speech Assistant (ELSA) Speak application. The results of the study showed that "ELSA Speak" can help students pronounce words more clearly, easily, and fluently. Another study conducted by Rosyid & Hidayati (2021), titled "Teaching Pronunciation Through MALL: Promoting EFL Learners' Pronunciation and Their Learning Autonomy," explains that the ELSA Speak application can also be used to help students learn to speak English independently because its features are very easy to understand and proven effective. This can serve as a basis for using the ELSA Speak application to help EFL students improve their speaking skills and increase their motivation to practice pronunciation. This research focuses on the experiences of EFL students using the ELSA Speak application to support their pronunciation skills. It is conducted to determine the effectiveness and challenges perceived by students in using the ELSA Speak application to improve their pronunciation skills.

## **2. Research Method**

The researchers applied a survey research design to investigate the experiences of EFL students in learning pronunciation using the ELSA Speak application. This design was chosen because the researchers wanted to gain a better understanding of how the application affects the students' pronunciation learning process. According to Islamy (2019), survey research is a data collection method that can use questionnaires and interviews obtained from a sample of people, which can represent a specific population according to the research interests, what they think, feel, or the tendency of an action.

This research uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a model of research that is humanistic in nature, where humans in this study are placed as the main subjects in a social event (Safarudin et al., 2023). The research subjects were students from the 2024 cohort of the English Education programme at Universitas PGRI

Ronggolawe (Unirow) for one semester. This research specifically took a sample of 14 students to gather more in-depth and focused data on their experiences while using the Elsa Speak application.

The researcher used two data collection methods, namely the distribution of questionnaires and interviews. Providing questionnaires to observe EFL students' experiences with the use of the ELSA Speak application and interviewing several selected students to gain deeper insights into their experiences and the benefits of using the ELSA Speak application.

In data collection, the researcher first used a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a data collection technique that involves providing a series of written questions to respondents to be answered. This technique is widely used in research because it allows for the collection of data from many respondents in a more efficient manner in terms of time and cost (Hartono, 2018). This questionnaire consists of 18 statements grouped into 6 main points, namely: interest in using Elsa Speak, the usefulness of Elsa Speak, confidence and progress, ease of using Elsa Speak, recommendation of Elsa Speak, and each student's opinion about Elsa Speak. The response pattern used for the statements is strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The researchers used Google Forms to collect data from the students.

Both researchers used interview techniques. According to Huberman & Miles (1992), interviews are a data collection technique that involves direct interaction between the researcher and the respondent, where the researcher asks questions to delve into in-depth information about the topic being studied. In the interview process, the researcher will pose various questions to the respondent. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents' views, experiences, and perceptions related to a specific topic. This method allows the researcher to delve into information more thoroughly and understand the context behind the answers provided by the respondents. The researchers selected 4 students for the interview because they have experience using the ELSA Speak application gradually and their experience using the application in learning proper and correct language pronunciation.

ELSA Speak is an application that uses speech synthesis technology to teach vocabulary and grammar to users (Muamar et al., 2022). With the help of voice recognition technology, ELSA can assist users in correcting and improving their English pronunciation with an error detection rate of over 95% (Luu et al., 2021). Additionally, users can receive feedback to correct their pronunciation errors, and there are more than 1300 lessons and 70 topics available to practice pronunciation, ranging from words to phrases relevant to users' needs (Tran, 2019).

### **3. Result and Discussion**

#### *3.1 Result*

This research deeply examines the experiences of EFL students in using the ELSA Speak application to improve their pronunciation skills at PGRI Ronggolawe University. Through a qualitative approach involving questionnaires and interviews with 14 second-semester English education students, it was found that the ELSA Speak application serves as a highly effective tool. Questionnaire data shows that

the majority of respondents, around 80%, expressed satisfaction and enjoyment in using this application, highlighting its interactive features and ability to provide instant feedback as the main factors that make pronunciation practice more engaging and practical. This aligns with the generally accepted pedagogical principle that learning involving immediate feedback and allowing learner autonomy tends to enhance motivation and skill acquisition effectiveness, particularly in the context of pronunciation that requires repeated correction.

In-depth interviews with four selected students (H.S., R.W., R.A.P., and G.N.K.R.) further reinforced these findings, with reports of significant increases in confidence when speaking English after using the application. Students rated their pronunciation progress between 8 and 9.5 out of 10, indicating a strong positive impact. They consistently highlight the application's ability to detect errors and provide valuable evaluations, which allows them to identify areas of weakness and make improvements. This phenomenon confirms the role of automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology in facilitating self-directed language learning, a concept that is increasingly relevant in modern education.

Nevertheless, this study also identifies several challenges. Students occasionally reported difficulties with the detection of certain voices by the application or unclear pronunciation of words, as well as minor technical issues that could disrupt the learning flow. These challenges, although not diminishing the overall effectiveness of the application, highlight the current limitations of ASR technology in handling individual pronunciation variations or diverse accents, an area that often becomes the focus of research in language learning technology development.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with the existing literature on the effectiveness of the ELSA Speak application in improving EFL pronunciation skills. No deviations were found from previous research results that indicated the benefits of this application; instead, it further strengthens the empirical evidence in the specific context of Indonesian students.

### 3.2 *Discussion*

Research findings indicate that the ELSA Speak application is a highly effective tool in improving the pronunciation skills of EFL students, directly addressing the study's question about how technology can support pronunciation learning and confirming the hypothesis that this application has a positive impact. Students' positive perceptions, reflected in high satisfaction levels and significant improvements in confidence (scores of 8-9.5 out of 10), indicate that this application successfully addresses the common challenges students face in articulating their language clearly and confidently. ELSA Speak can provide engaging learning activities to enhance audience enjoyment. In the use of ELSA

Speak, to maintain users' interest and inspiration in practicing pronouncing words correctly in English, the application combines courses and interactive activities (Syabina, 2024). For the target population, namely EFL students, the implications are very positive: ELSA Speak offers an accessible and interactive solution to overcome pronunciation barriers, allowing them to practice independently and receive instant feedback that is crucial for improvement.

These findings substantially enrich the existing literature on the role of technology in language education, particularly in pronunciation acquisition. Previous research, such as that conducted by Akhmad & Munawir (2022) and Darsih et al. (2021), has shown the effectiveness of ELSA Speak and positive student perceptions. This study not only confirms those results in the context of PGRI Ronggolawe University but also provides deeper qualitative insights into user experiences, including the most appreciated aspects (interactive features, immediate feedback) and the challenges faced (specific voice detection, minor technical issues). Teaching speaking with ELSA Speak has proven to bring several benefits to students (Nguyen, 2021). Thus, this research reinforces the argument that AI-based applications and automatic speech recognition can be a strong complement to traditional teaching methods, facilitating self-directed learning and reducing speaking anxiety, as emphasized by Taqy (2021). For future research directions, it is recommended to first investigate the effectiveness of the ELSA Speak application at various educational levels. Second, explore methods to integrate this application into the formal curriculum to maximize its benefits.

## **Acknowledgements**

The researcher expresses gratitude to God Almighty for His grace, gifts, and guidance, enabling the successful and timely completion of this article, "EFL STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH ELSA'S SPEAKING APPLICATION TO LEARN PRONUNCIATION." The researcher acknowledges that the completion of this article would not have been possible without the support of various parties. Therefore, the author would like to express her gratitude to:

1. Dr. Risa Triassanti, M.Pd., Head of the English Language Education Study Programme, who provided support and facilities during the preparation of this article.
2. Dr. Christina I.T. Panggabean, M.Pd., Supervisor, who provided guidance, attention, and constructive input, enabling the researcher to successfully complete this article.
3. I would like to thank the second-semester students of the 2024/2025 academic year who participated in this research for their time and invaluable contributions, which ensured the smooth running and success of the study.

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