

Using ELSA Speak for EFL Student's Pronunciation: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Pronunciation is an essential part of the field of communication. However, it can be challenging for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to pronounce confidently due to several pronunciation problems. To respond to these problems, the researcher aimed to explore EFL students' perspectives on the impact of using ELSA Speak. The researcher first conducted a literature review analysis by observing fifteen articles published in national and international journals. Then, five participants who had taken an Academic Speaking class in batch 2021 or 2022 were interviewed to discuss the results of the literature review analysis and explored participants' personal experiences using ELSA Speak. The data was qualitatively examined and presented as themes. The results showed positive perspectives from the participants when using ELSA Speak, which highlighted four themes included in the findings. At the end of the paper, the researcher presented practical recommendations for the teacher and future researchers regarding using ELSA Speak to learn pronunciation.

Keywords: *ELSA Speak*; Pronunciation; Feedback

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is becoming increasingly important because of its importance in speech communication and speaker identity. In communication, pronunciation is crucial. Understanding between the speaker and the listener is necessary for communication. Even if a speaker's vocabulary and grammar are good, communication can still be hindered by unclear pronunciation, which causes misunderstandings between the speaker and the listener (Ikhsan, 2021). Not only that, but Rismawati et al. (2022) also added that pronunciation not only serves as a component of the English course but can also affect how well students speak. However, it has recently been noticed that many students experience difficulties in pronunciation (e.g., Amalia & Husna, 2020; Fadillah, 2020; Kosasih, 2021). According to Abbas and Fathira (2020), students often struggle to adopt proper pronunciation due to time limitations, role model influence, and other factors. In addition, a lack of interaction with native speakers makes it difficult for students to listen and imitate good pronunciation, resulting in students being unable to pronounce words correctly. Dewi et al. (2022) also added that the fear of making mistakes stems from the fear of negative evaluation. These difficulties faced by students can cause mispronunciation, which results in word variances, leading to inaccurate meanings. Recently, technology has been offered as a solution to pronunciation problems. According to Carstens et al. (2021), technology is increasingly used in the classroom. One of the technology tools that students can use to learn English pronunciation is *ELSA Speak* (Anggraini, 2022). There has been a growing role in using *ELSA (English Language Speech Assistant) Speak* to reduce students' pronunciation problems. Akhmad and Munawir (2022) stated that *ELSA Speak* can help student practice and improve their speaking skills by correcting incorrect pronunciation and explaining how to pronounce English correctly.

Several studies (e.g., Akhmad & Munawir, 2022; Samad & Ismail, 2020) applied quantitative methods to investigate the application's effectiveness in improving student pronunciation. Even though many researchers stated that *ELSA Speak* effectively strengthens students' pronunciation skills, few studies have been conducted to explore EFL students' perspectives on the impact of using the *ELSA Speak* application. In addition, little is known about the students' perspectives or critical responses to the literature discussing *ELSA Speak* in pronunciation. Therefore, to respond to the study, the researcher explores EFL students' perspectives regarding the impacts experienced when using *ELSA Speak*. More specifically, the researcher will answer the following research question: *What are EFL students' perspectives on the impact of ELSA Speak on their English pronunciation skills?*

Answers to the research questions will benefit EFL students and teachers by helping them understand the potential benefits or challenges of using *ELSA Speak* to teach and learn pronunciations. By knowing the benefits and challenges of using *ELSA Speak*, students will have a clear and broad view of how this application can help their pronunciation learning. This exploration will also help teachers improve teaching strategies using this application to make pronunciation teaching more effective and enjoyable for their EFL students. Pronunciation is the act or result of sound production in speech and pronunciation, accent, and intonation. In speaking, the most important thing people must know is how to pronounce words well (Fadhiah et al., 2023; Kholis, 2021). Miqawati (2020) also added that pronunciation plays a vital role in comprehending and interpreting a speaker's intents and spoken language, and speakers with wrong pronunciation may be regarded as unintelligible. *ELSA Speak* application is one media that can help promote education in the era of 4.0. *ELSA Speak* is an abbreviation for English Language Speech Assistant (Samad & Ismail, 2020). It is developed with many features to improve learners' pronunciation with an American accent by putting them through several exercises to pronounce a word/phrase/sentence accurately. Darsih and Asikin (2020) also stated that *ELSA Speak* is an app that helps students improve their English communication skills. This software uses AI and speech recognition to improve English pronunciation, which is often an obstacle to fluent and confident speaking. Literature has reported various advantages of using *ELSA Speak* to enhance EFL students' English pronunciation. This application is simple to use and can help all students practice English pronunciation. Apart from that, several exciting parts may increase students' interest in studying. In their research, Karim et al. (2023) stated that most respondents said *ELSA Speak* may help them pronounce words correctly, boost their confidence in speaking sessions, and recognize their mistakes. Aswaty and Indari (2022) in their research concluded that the *ELSA Speak* application has advantages such as using "proprietary artificial intelligence" (AI), such as automated voice recognition (ASR), to provide feedback on users' pronunciation accuracy. Not only have various advantages been reported, but some studies have also reported various challenges of using *ELSA Speak* to enhance EFL students' pronunciation. Yosintha and Rekha (2022) stated that some users felt that using *ELSA Speak* could affect the performance of users' mobile phones. This problem may be related to application sizes that reach 30 MB, which may cause slowdown with frequent use. In their study, Yosintha and Rekha (2022) also mentioned that using *ELSA Speak* requires an internet connection. The low internet connection can make this application difficult for students to access. In another study, based on Aswaty and Indari (2022), it was stated that the topic is limited by paid content; users who use paid applications will get access to broader and deeper learning compared to users with limited access to several topics.

METHOD

This study aims to explore EFL students' perspectives regarding the impacts experienced when using *ELSA Speak*. To address the research goal, the researcher approached the study

qualitatively (Umanailo et al., 2020). This method is considered relevant for asking about the student's learning experiences. More specifically, the researcher first conducted a literature analysis on fifteen articles (see Table 1) published in peer-reviewed international and national journals relevant to the purposes of this study. To find those articles, the researchers found the articles from the following databases: *SINTA* and *Google Scholar*, using the following keywords: "pronunciation," "*ELSA Speak* for English pronunciation," "the advantages of *ELSA Speak*," and "the challenges of *ELSA Speak*." Non-empirical studies were excluded from the analysis.

Table 1. Empirical Studies Reviewed in This Study

Journal Title	Empirical Study	Research Goal	Context and Participants
Edukatif: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan	Elsani et al. (2023)	To explore the efficacy of <i>ELSA Speak</i> in improving students' English speaking abilities in the Department of English Education	31 university students in Indonesia
English Review	Darsih and Asikin (2020)	To investigate university students' perceptions toward MALL, specifically the usage of mobile apps for English language learning	96 university students in Indonesia
Ethical Lingua: <i>Journal of Language Teaching and Literature</i>	Khadijah et al. (2023)	To find out how the students perceive learning English with <i>ELSA Speak</i>	15 junior high school students in Indonesia
UG Journal	Fatimah 2021	To determine whether <i>ELSA Speak</i> , an existing mobile-assisted language learning application, is effective in helping EFL learners practice and enhance their pronunciation	15 EFL learners
IDEAS: Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature	Akhmad and Munawir (2022)	To find out the improvement of students' pronunciation skills in English and student perceptions while using the <i>ELSA Speak</i> application	20 people majoring in English at the University of West Sulawesi, Indonesia

Journal Title	Empirical Study	Research Goal	Context and Participants
IJEE (<i>Indonesian Journal of English Education</i>)	Yosintha and Rekha (2022)	To investigate how the students view <i>ELSA Speak</i> when learning pronunciation online	112 students in the English Department in Indonesia
JEELL (<i>Journal of English Education, Linguistics and Literature</i>)	Saragih et al. (2021)	To investigate how digital feedback on <i>ELSA Speak</i> can be implemented for students and the advantages it offers for English language learning	The seventh grade of junior high school
Journal of Language and Language Teaching	Karim et al. (2023)	To explore EFL students' speaking performance using the <i>ELSA speak</i> application, investigate their perceptions further, and identify the barriers causing low speaking performance	21 EFL students from the English Language Education Study Program at Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Journal on Teacher Education	Simanjuntak et al. (2023)	To determine the students' pronunciation skills and to know what kinds of mistakes students make when using <i>ELSA Speak</i>	15 students of the English Department in Medan, Indonesia
Journey: Journal of English Language and Pedagogy	Anggraini (2022)	To discuss how <i>the ELSA Speak</i> Application can help students enhance their pronunciation	30 students in Easy English Course (EEC) at Basic class level
Majesty Journal	Samad and Ismail (2020)	To find out the efficiency of the <i>ELSA Speak</i> application in improving students' pronunciation	The students in first semester English Study Program in the academic year 2018/ 2019 in Indonesia

Journal Title	Empirical Study	Research Goal	Context and Participants
Pedagogy: Journal of English Language Teaching	Kholis (2021)	To know the student's responses and development while using <i>ELSA Speak</i>	18 English Education students in semester two at Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Serunai: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan	Aswanty and Indari (2022)	To know how the <i>ELSA Speak</i> application improves students' speaking abilities	40 students in eleventh grade in the academic year 2021/2022 in Indonesia
TELL US Journal	Suryadi and Yuliawati (2023)	To evaluate students' perspectives toward <i>ELSA Speak</i> 's effectiveness in improving their English speaking skills	60 high school students in Indonesia
The Proceedings of ELTLT: <i>English Language Teaching, Literature, and Translation</i>	Rismawati et al. 2021	To investigate the effectiveness of <i>ELSA Speak</i> in improving English pronunciation and describe students' attitudes using this application	30 junior high school students in Indonesia

Research Participants

After conducting the literature analysis, the researcher interviewed five students from batch 2021 or 2022 in English Language Education at a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. They were selected because they have experienced using the *ELSA Speak* application in their *Academic Speaking* class, so they could give their perspective about the application. We used pseudonyms to refer to the participants and protect their real identities. All of the participants were Lina (student 1), Vino (student 2), Riani (student 3), Yolanda (student 4), and Abe (student 5). The researcher interviewed the students to discuss the results of the literature review analysis.

Data Collection

To conduct the interview, the researcher contacted the potential participants via *WhatsApp* to explain the purposes of the study and answer any questions they might have about the study. Then, the researcher asked for the student's willingness to participate in this study. The researcher asked about the participants' experiences using *ELSA Speak* in their pronunciation learning. Furthermore, the researcher asked several questions about *ELSA Speak* to find out the participants' perspectives on this application regarding pronunciation. After that, the researcher provided a list of statements (i.e., the results of the literature review analysis) related to the purposes of the study and asked the participants to respond to those statements in the interview

session. All the interview sections' results were transcribed for data analysis. The researcher asked the participants to respond to the results of the literature analysis. The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting (online) using *Bahasa Indonesia/English* to ensure the participants' depth of understanding during the discussion session, which lasted between 20-25 minutes. Before the interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked the participants to sign a consent form to be research participants in this study. Furthermore, the researcher ensured the participants that there would be no risk to participating in the study.

Data Analysis

There were two data analysis stages. First, the researcher read the collected articles several times and highlighted any words, phrases, or sentences that are closely related to the research question of this study. Then, the researcher developed themes in the form of phrases or sentences as the answer to the research question. This theme was presented in the findings section. Second, to analyze the interview data, the researcher read the transcript and did the same thing described above. The interview excerpts were used to support the data analysis results. To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher applied a member-checking technique. All the interview sections were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for data analysis. After completing the transcription, the researcher gave it to the participants to confirm what they had said in their previous interview session. The researcher used this technique as previous research (e.g., Candela, 2019; Mali & Salsbury, 2022; Wardani & Mali, 2023; Zairul, 2021) successfully implemented this member-checking approach to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The main focus of this study is to examine and answer the research question: *What are EFL students' perspectives on the impact of ELSA Speak on their English pronunciation skills?* In this section, the researcher summarizes and presents the overall findings from the results of the literature review analysis and includes excerpts from the data obtained from student interviews. The following section will show the themes generated from the data analysis to answer the research question.

ELSA Speak Gives Useful Feedback to Improve Pronunciation

Most previous researchers reported that *the ELSA Speak* application provides feedback that helps students learn pronunciation. The study aligns with previous studies (e.g., Anggraini, 2022; Aswaty & Indari, 2022; Karim et al., 2023; Sholekhah & Fakhurriana, 2023). The studies stated that this application provides instant feedback to users. When users make pronunciation mistakes, they can immediately correct and change them (Simanjuntak et al., 2023). Some students mentioned these in the interview.

[...] The feedback from *ELSA Speak* is clear and very detailed, for example, about our accent, intonation, syllable stress, or pronunciation of our syllables. If there is a mistake, feedback will be given in detail. [Lina/ Interview/ 23 Sept]

ELSA Speak helps me in learning pronunciation. When I make mistakes, I know which part is wrong, and *ELSA Speak* provides feedback on which part is wrong and which we should fix, so I know where my mistake is. [...] [Vino/ Interview/ 27 Sept]

At the end of the session, the app will provide a summary or feedback containing justifications for stress, pronunciation, and fluency levels (Elsani et al., 2023). With this feedback, users are

helped to find areas where they may have difficulty or make mistakes. Darsih and Asikin (2020) also add that this technology, *ELSA Speak*, can show more than 95% accuracy in detecting the user's pronunciation errors.

***ELSA Speak* Increases Motivation and Confidence in Pronunciation**

Recently, *ELSA Speak* managed to increase students' motivation to learn effectively (eg., Elsani et al., 2023; Karim et al., 2023; Kholis, 2021). Anggraini (2022) also added that, in practice, students can be effectively involved in the learning process and get more motivated to take advantage of the *ELSA Speak* Application in the pronunciation class. Other studies also state that this application greatly affects students' English confidence (eg., Akhmad & Munawir, 2022; Samad & Ismail, 2020; Yuliawati & Suryadi, 2023). The results show that *ELSA Speak* positively impacts students, such as improving their pronunciation, and the feedback provided allows them to track their progress over time. Below are what some students confessed in the interview.

[...] When we learn using this app, our mindset has formed that we are learning independently and no one is judging, so after we get constructive feedback, we can learn from our mistakes, and finally, we know where our mistakes are, and we can speak with the correct pronunciation confidently. [Riani/ Interview/ 25 Sept]

I remember at that time, I had difficulty with pronunciation; my difficulties were when pronouncing -th like 'thing, thank.' When I make a mistake, this application gives me feedback, like tips on pronouncing -th correctly. I felt motivated because I could fix my mistake. [Vino/ Interview/ 27 Sept]

It was also confirmed by Saragih et al. (2021) that this application provides feedback such as "Great! You look like a native speaker," which then succeeded in increasing students' motivation to complete more pronunciation activities in this application. In this study, the researcher also explained that *ELSA Speak* can boost students' confidence and that they no longer experience fear or anxiety when speaking or explaining in English. This application also allows students to practice their pronunciation because this application is enjoyable to use so the student is more motivated to learn without feeling stuffy, bored, and sleepy (Rismawati et al., 2022).

***ELSA Speak* Is Flexible to be Used by Students for Independent Learning**

Many studies have demonstrated that *ELSA Speak* offers flexibility in the process of learning pronunciation. Sholekhah & Fakhurrriana (2023) reported that this application is very flexible. Fatimah (2021) also noted that students can practice their pronunciation at any time and from any location at the reach of their fingertips. These are what some students confessed in the interview.

[...] So, for example, if we are studying, we can pause it and stop studying for a while and then continue it again; we can choose our own time and schedule. [Yolanda/Interview/25 Sept]

[...] I agree that this application is flexible. It is an application; we as students are free to use it anytime and anywhere, and we can use it in our free time. [Abe/ Interview/ 25 Sept]

Khadijah et al. (2023) also stated, "This application contributes to students' English progress. Students can read words, phrases, and situational sentence patterns by themselves and then be assessed and corrected by Elsa's artificial intelligence. Students can learn how much they can pronounce sentences according to native speaker standards. This app truly offers users the ability to learn according to their needs. It also allows users to learn independently without

sticking to a set time. This research was supported by the findings of Yosintha and Rekha (2022), who stated that this app can be accessed online anytime and from anywhere, which means that *ELSA Speak* is suitable for use as an online learning media.

ELSA Speak Provides Various Learning Materials that Can be Selected by Students

Most studies stated that *ELSA Speak* provides level features that allow users to choose and customize their abilities. According to Yuliawati and Suryadi (2023) this application offers a lot of fun materials that can be selected by students. Hanna et al. (2022) also found that *ELSA Speak* offers a wide range of topics to suit the user's needs, allowing them to practice any subject they want. Here is what some students stated in the interview.

I think Elsa provides a variety of materials and contents; it is challenging, but I am still capable of learning this pronunciation. I like this application because the materials are fun. [...] [Lina/Interview/23 Sept]

[...] This application provides a lot of fun material so that I can choose according to my abilities. It has a lot of challenging materials, so I can choose and practice it.

[Yolanda/Interview/25 Sept]

This theme is also supported by Anggraini (2022), who states that there are a lot of categories or content provided by this application so that users can adjust their level of English proficiency. This application also provides several features that can be used as learning references. Furthermore, Darsih and Asikin (2020) also mentioned that this application provides more than 1,200 lessons and more than 60 topics for users to practice pronunciation.

Discussion

This systematic review explores how students' perspectives on using *ELSA Speak* for their English pronunciation skills. The findings inform four essential themes. The first theme focuses on *ELSA Speak*, which gives useful feedback on improving pronunciation. This theme indicates that this application is designed with AI intelligence, which offers instant feedback features to its users. Darsih and Asikin (2020) reported that this application can provide up to 95% accuracy in pronunciation. This statement is also supported by the previous studies (e.g., Anggraini, 2022; Aswaty & Indari, 2022; Karim et al., 2023; Sholekhah & Fakhurrriana, 2023), which explained that users could make corrections and changes right away by using this feedback to spot areas where they might be struggling or making mistakes.

The second theme in the study is closely related to *ELSA Speak*, which increases motivation and confidence in pronunciation. Most previous studies emphasize that this application can increase students' motivation and confidence in learning pronunciation. Samad and Ismail (2020) noted that this application will help users better understand their learning process with the feedback provided. The results of the feedback provided by this application show that *ELSA Speak* not only improves pronunciation skills but also functions as a tool that supports students emotionally. In addition, *ELSA Speak* has also increased students' confidence when speaking in English (eg., Akhmad & Munawir, 2022; Samad & Ismail, 2020; Yuliawati & Suryadi, 2023). On the other hand, students can learn independently without judgment from others, so they will be more confident when speaking.

The studies also highlighted the flexibility offered by this application as a way to learn pronunciation independently. This application allows users to create pronunciation learning time. One of the main advantages of this application is that it does not provide time constraints like learning in class, so this application can be used by users to learn pronunciation anywhere and anytime. This theme is a result of study conducted by Yosintha and Rekha (2022), which confirmed that this application is flexible because it can be accessed anywhere and anytime.

This advantage allows users to use their free time more effectively and create more learning opportunities. The latest theme in this study is that the *ELSA Speak* application provides a wide variety of learning materials that follow the user's abilities. According to Darsih and Asikin (2020), this application displays more than 1200 lessons and more than 60 topics for users to use in their pronunciation practice. This application offers a variety of topics or material content that allows students to choose relevant content. The statement confirmed by Anggraini (2022) stated that this application provides many content categories that allow them to customize their respective learning. In addition, this application also includes levels, which means the material provided is adjusted from beginner to advanced level so users can develop at their own pace (Yuliawati & Suryadi, 2023).

CONCLUSION

From the overall findings and discussion, this study concluded that EFL students have positive perspectives towards using the *ELSA Speak* app for their pronunciation, which can be seen from the analysis of the themes in this study. The first finding confirms that this application provides instant feedback to students in learning. With this feedback, users can immediately find out how their pronunciation is when using this application so that they can immediately correct these errors. Furthermore, this study also found that this application offers flexibility as an independent learning medium. Because of its flexibility, users can practice pronunciation using this application anytime and anywhere. Furthermore, this study concluded that *ELSA Speak* might increase motivation and self-confidence among users. In this study, the participants reported being more confident speaking English. It proves that this application can significantly increase students' self-confidence and motivation in learning. The last is that this study concludes that this application can provide a variety of lessons that allow users to choose them. With a large selection of materials, users can easily focus on learning according to their abilities (Yuliawati & Suryadi, 2023). Based on the findings and discussion of the study, the researcher would like to provide the following recommendations to teachers regarding using *ELSA Speak* to help students learn pronunciation. Teachers can include *ELSA Speak* in the lesson plan as an effective tool for teaching pronunciation. This application provides instant feedback that allows students to know their pronunciation mistakes, so they can be encouraged to be more active in correcting their pronunciation mistakes without waiting for evaluation from the teacher. Furthermore, teachers can utilize this application as an independent assignment for students. This task can be in the form of pronunciation exercises that can be completed before the next meeting to provide learning opportunities for students consistently outside of pronunciation learning in class. Last, the teacher can assess the students' pronunciation skills using this application. Teachers can ask students to make a report on using *ELSA Speak* every week so that teachers can monitor the development of each student's pronunciation skills when using this application. In closing, the researcher would like to make recommendations for future research to follow up on this research. Researchers can expand the number of more diverse participants, such as *ELSA Speak* users from various study programs, because the current researcher only focuses on one study program. With the expansion of participants, future researchers will receive various perspectives from different backgrounds. Expanding participants in the interview will provide richer and more in-depth data. Furthermore, by involving various participant backgrounds, researchers will find it easier to obtain information that cannot be obtained from participants who have the same background.

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