

Elsa Speak App: An Alternative Media to Improve EFL Students' Speaking Skills in Indonesian Higher Education

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Abstract

The present study aims to explore the implementation of the Elsa Speak application to improve the English learning process, especially in speaking ability. In addition, the study explores the perceptions of students in Indonesian higher education regarding the use of the Elsa application and the benefits of the application to convince students out there to be confident in using this application. In collecting data, the authors used qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The findings revealed that students' English speaking skills have improved after using the Elsa application in the learning process. This can be seen from the interviews with participants and the final results of filling out the questionnaire. Therefore, the results of the study provide a contribution that the role of the Elsa Speak App is beneficial to increase the motivation of EFL students to learn speaking skills. The implication is discussed in this study.

Keywords: *EFL; Elsa Speak App; Learning English; Speaking; Online Application*

INTRODUCTION

English has become the most important language in the world today. Many people use it as a medium of communication as it is easier for people from different countries to interact and communicate using English. In addition, in the era of globalization, English has an important role in various fields including economy, politics, culture, communication, and education. Therefore, mastering English is crucial in Indonesia (Lee, Lee, and Arifah Drahati 2019). English plays a significant role in Indonesia and is used in various situations.

Today's technological advancements make English language skills very important. English is currently used for various purposes and activities. In learning English, four skills need to be considered: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Learning and mastering these four skills is very important in the process of learning English. (Maulina and Yustika 2022). One of the most important English skills is

speaking. They must be proficient in speaking English, in addition to mastering grammatical structures and pronunciation. If they want to compete internationally, Indonesians must be proficient in speaking English. For others not to be confused with what we are talking about, we must imitate the correct pronunciation when speaking with others, especially native speakers. Indonesians who start learning English, especially speaking, most often face problems in pronouncing words because there are significant sound differences between the sounds in Indonesian and English. (Tambunsaribu and Simatupang 2021)

Technology has an important role in education. With the internet, students can access English materials more easily. For example, during the pandemic, to ensure teaching and learning takes place during the global lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and schools are using almost every digital tool at their disposal. (Teräs et al. 2020). Pourhosein Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) said That said, technology has been adapted to support English language teaching approaches. In other words, technology plays an important role in educators' approaches to encouraging students to participate in activities. (Rita and Handrianto 2021).

Many students around the world were unable to go to school during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the pandemic has had a significant impact on education. People had to find new methods for learning and teaching. To learn, they started using various educational apps. Many research papers have shown that technology is beneficial for language learning. Technology greatly helps teachers and students by providing various ways to learn English. To improve their communication, students can use various educational apps such as MEMRISE, DUOLINGO, and Elsa Speak. (Francisco et al. 2021). The process of learning should not be limited to the classroom, as students can access it through online educational applications (Samad and Ismail 2020).

Some researchers have proven that the use of technology as a learning medium, such as speech recognition software, podcasts, video conferencing, and the internet, is considered the best method to teach speaking skills. (Arvanitis and Krystalli 2021). Xodabande (2017) Has researched how effectively Iranian EFL students use social networking sites. The researcher split the participants into experimental and control groups. After using a t-test to compare student performance, she found that the pronunciation of students in the experimental group was better than the control group. In addition, the study found that the use of social networking sites helps in language teaching. For example, Telegram significantly improved the quality of participants' pronunciation. Telegram is an example of social media. In recent years, the use of social media has been shown to improve learning and academic outcomes. (Al-Jarrah et al., 2019). Using today's technological advances, students who are interested in pronunciation can learn independently. (Al-Jarrah et al. 2019). If students are interested in learning

pronunciation, they can now do so independently thanks to current technological advancements.

We need engaging learning materials to boost student motivation and performance in pronunciation and speaking. (Ismail, Elihami, and Mustakim 2019). ELSA (English Language Speech Assistant) is an app designed to help improve English pronunciation and support education in a fun and engaging way. (Dhivya et al. 2023). This research aims to encourage students in Indonesia to use the Elsa Speak application for their English learning activities. Elsa Speak offers various features that can be useful for students to improve their English pronunciation. Additionally, Elsa Speak employs unique methods not found in any other language learning application.

METHODE

This study uses qualitative and quantitative methods to find out in-depth about the perspectives of IAIN KUDUS students regarding the use of the Elsa application in assisting the speaking-learning process. In this study, participants' data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. In this study, the author used the interview method using a semi-structured interview model to collect data. The interview with each participant lasted for approximately 10 minutes. Meanwhile, questionnaires were distributed to 10 students from general majors who had experience using the Elsa Speak application with the participants. The participants were selected from IAIN KUDUS students, specifically from the Department of Tadris English and other general majors (excluding Tadris English) who had experience using the Elsa application. This research was conducted at Institut Agama Islam Negri Kudus, at the interview stage where participants were sought by announcing in the Grub Chat of classes A, B, and C of Tadris English to look for individuals with experience in using the Elsa application. Then after that, the researcher managed to find participants consisting of 4 3rd semester students from classes A, B, and C of the IAIN KUDUS English Department.

No	Name	Age	length of time using the Elsa app	Job	Sex
1	Students 1	18 th	4 month	Student	F
2.	Students 2	19 th	7 month	Student	F
3.	Students 2	19 th	2 month	Student	F
4.	Students 3	19 th	5 month	Student	F

Figure 1. Demographic characteristics of participants' interview

No.	Name	Age	Length of time using the Elsa app	Job	Sex
1.	LSH	19 th	5 month	Student	Female
2.	CMD	19 th	3 month	Student	Female
3.	NH	18 th	5 month	Student	Female
4.	TP	19 th	2 month	Student	Female
5.	VIN	20 th	4 month	Student	Female
6.	ANM	20 th	1 month	Student	Female
7.	NMSD	19 th	2,5 month	Student	Female
8.	AWD	20 th	1 month	Student	Female
9.	YTV	20 th	2 month	Student	Female
10.	ERL	21 th	3,5 month	Student	Female

Figure 2. Demographic characteristics of participants' questioner

A mixed-method research design was applied to this study to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative methods Researchers collect data using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Data collection by interview was addressed to IAIN KUDUS female students as conveyed by Elhami and Khoshnevisan (2022) Qualitative research typically uses interviews to gain an understanding of a person's subjective experiences, opinions, and drives. In qualitative research, there are three main types of interviews used: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. Each interviewee is asked to answer questions from the researcher based on the participant's experience. The interview guideline used included questions related to students' perceptions related to students in the use of the ELSA application as stated by Knott et al. (2022) The research question, the type of data desired, and the advantages and disadvantages of each method should be taken into consideration when choosing an interview method. Researchers should consider various methodological, analytical, and ethnic issues when conducting qualitative interviews. To overcome these issues, a method that is transparent, repetitive, and focuses on its interactive aspects can be used. (Busetto, Wick, and Gumbinger 2020).

In collecting quantitative data, a questionnaire method was used involving ten students of the general study program (who have experience in the Elsa application) IAIN KUDUS. The questionnaire consisted of five questions and used a Likert scale consisting of four points, namely agree, strongly agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire contained the following questions Do you use the Elsa app to learn to Speak especially in pronunciation, Do you find the Elsa app easy to use, Do you find the Elsa app effective in helping you learn English? Are you satisfied with the content available on the Elsa app? Would you recommend the Elsa app to others?

The results of the interview researchers then filtered the data first commonly called data reduction. according to Suboh et al. (2023), Researchers can streamline

their analysis, improve efficiency, and facilitate the extraction of valuable insights by reducing data. This allows them to eliminate irrelevant results, outliers, or errors, and condense results to a manageable size without losing important information

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Student-facing problems experienced by students in terms of speaking

Student 1

"I don't think I have any obstacles in the process of producing words, but my biggest challenge is my lack of confidence. I think a lack of confidence beats everything. So for example I have prepared carefully for a speech in front of the class, then the lack of confidence invades my mind and causes my preparation to go to waste and freeze in front. I've experienced something like that many times."

Student 2

"I think one of my biggest challenges is my lack of vocabulary. For example, when I want to say something in English and then don't know the English word. The second challenge is grammar, if my grammar is wrong I'm afraid my audience won't understand what I'm saying."

Student 3

"There is nothing difficult in speaking in my opinion even though my speaking is not good and fluent, in my opinion, if you want to improve your speaking skills so that you can be fluent like a native, you have to practice as often as possible. Yes, I am one of those people who rarely practice speaking so my speaking is not yet fluent, I don't practice enough because I don't have friends to communicate with."

Student 4

"I'm afraid of being teased by my friends if I speak English, afraid of being called pretentious, and also I'm embarrassed to speak English because my accent is different from native speakers. Actually, I am confident even though my accent is medok (designation in Javanese) but again I am afraid of being laughed at by my friends."

From the above statement, the researcher concluded that there were several problems faced by the participants when they wanted to speak in English. In this study, the researcher found that the causative factor of speaking problems faced by the participants based on the first interview was a lack of confidence. In the pursuit of students' speaking proficiency, self-confidence is essential (Wahyuningsih and Afandi 2020). Most of them felt shy to speak for fear of being judged by others. They may feel worried about making mistakes or using the wrong grammar when speaking English, which can cause feelings of fear and lack of confidence. This is in line with Rahayu (2020) that the factor that affects students' lack of confidence in speaking English is that they feel embarrassed or afraid of their classmates'

responses when they are wrong in speaking English. In addition, the absence of creative programs in learning that can help students use English causes students to have fewer opportunities to speak in English and less confidence in speaking in English. Students are not involved in outside activities and programs in English, such as workshops, seminars, and public speaking. As a result, students who have never been exposed to English may not become more confident in speaking. Therefore, they must engage in interesting learning activities and English programs outside the classroom. This will help them become more confident when interacting with others in English (Wahyuningsih n.d.; Wahyuningsih and Dewi 2019)

Then the second problem faced by students is the limited abilities they have such as lack of vocabulary and grammar. Grammar mastery can play an important role in improving students' speaking fluency; most students have problems expressing words properly and correctly (Wahyuningsih and Afandi 2020). This is in line with Mido (2019) Before making an utterance, they think about the specific grammar used. Due to the lack of vocabulary, most students cannot speak in the learning process. Vocabulary is the foundation of the English language. Alizadeh (2016) said that A person's vocabulary mastery is generally regarded as a reflection of their intelligence or level of education. For this reason, there are now many standardized tests, such as the SAT, that contain questions that measure a person's vocabulary knowledge. Without an extensive vocabulary and methods for acquiring new vocabulary, students are often unable to reach their potential and may not take advantage of the language learning opportunities that are all around them even though they are now easy, such as listening to the radio, listening to people speaking their native language, using language in various situations, and reading. Nowadays, technology is sophisticated, we can access what we want easily, but learners are more interested in playing social media than utilizing social media for things related to education.

The environment has a very important role in a student's learning process, especially in English speaking skills. As Haryati, H., & Dini (2016), The surrounding environment helps students learn and gives them the opportunity to do activities, have fun, and be creative. It also gives them the opportunity to experiment, experiment, and communicate to acquire new ideas and experiences. A supportive environment at home or in individual classrooms can significantly enhance the learning process by providing constant exposure to language and its use in everyday life. Through this habituation, students can improve their speaking ability, increase their vocabulary, and gain greater confidence in speaking English.

Students' perception of Elsa Speak App helps learners speak English more fluently

Students 1

"In my personal opinion, as long as I use the app, it can help me practice speaking English, especially on my pronunciation. Because when I pronounce a word, there will be immediate feedback on whether it is right or wrong from the app, making it

easier for me to correct what is wrong in my pronunciation. The Elsa app is also very interesting for me because during the learning it feels fun until I don't feel like I'm learning."

Students 2

"During my time using the Elsa Speak app, I have found it very helpful in my learning process in improving my pronunciation. Elsa provides many topics that relate to daily life. Elsa can also have difficulty levels according to the user's ability. This application is also available for non-paid but if you want to get full access, you can subscribe. Then this application can be used anytime without a time limit, but the difficulty in my opinion is that when the signal is bad, the learning will be a little disturbed."

Students 3

"I think the Elsa app has had a big impact on my pronunciation training. Because Elsa provides video tutorials from native speakers. And if we try to practice in pronouncing a word we will get feedback from the application whether it is wrong in the sound of vowels, consonants, and intonation in pronunciation."

Students 4

"Of the many apps for learning English, I finally found one that I think fits my needs perfectly. Elsa can freely choose the time to attend classes and with this Elsa, I can study anywhere and anytime without interruption. Besides that, the Elsa application has many interesting features. Elsa also provides many languages not only Indonesian"

Based on the interview results above, most participants said that they were helped by the Elsa app to improve their speaking. Because the Elsa app has utilized AI technology. according to Levy (2009) In addition, research has shown that the use of technology in language teaching results in improvements in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. They use the Elsa app because they think it has interesting features that are needed by students to help their speaking improvement learning process.

Some of the features include Elsa's word error feedback. This allows users to automatically receive justification corrections (in case of errors) in vowel sounds, consonants, and intonation as they speak the app. After that, the Elsa App offers many topics to learn, native tutors from abroad, and allows users to choose a free study time. This is in line with Aswaty and Indari (2022) In ELSA (English Language Speech Assistant), Speak becomes a medium to learn English with speech coach Ai. AI will select the best lessons to help you sound like a native speaker. Practice from over 1,600 lessons covering more than 40 topics and all English sounds. To improve speaking skills, use the ELSA English dictionary to look up words and practice pronouncing them. Users will then be able to see comparisons with native speakers to see their learning progress.

Participants also said that Elsa Speak provides many language options, not just English. So that users can choose the language according to what users need. this is

in line with Becker (2019) The basic ELSA interface is easy to use and provides navigation between topics, skills, levels, reports, and other features. Users can change the display language to one of three languages: English, Vietnamese, or Japanese. This is a great option for the audience targeted by this app.

The benefits that students get from using the ELSA application

Students 1

"I became more confident because I always practiced consistently to improve my pronunciation to speak English fluently."

Student 2

"Now my speaking skills are better than before and quite fluent because I utilize my free time by learning with Elsa. I feel very eager to continue learning because of the cool features of the app so it's like I've found a new passion and motivation to learn."

Student 3

"I made a lot of new friends from the Elsa Speak app and they are also one of the helping factors in improving my speaking because I often communicate via telephone with them."

Student 4

"Elsa Speak app has improved my pronunciation in English and increased my friendships."

Based on the interview results from the participants, the researcher found several advantages of using the Elsa Speak app. The researcher found several benefits from using the Elsa Speak application. First, Elsa speak has an impact in the form of increased self-confidence in users. By using this application, users can practice speaking with others. In addition, in terms of communication, if users are still afraid to start communicating with others, the Elsa app also provides a Bot to communicate for users who are still afraid to communicate with others. So it can be concluded that Elsa Speak has contributed to the process of increasing the confidence and speaking ability of users,

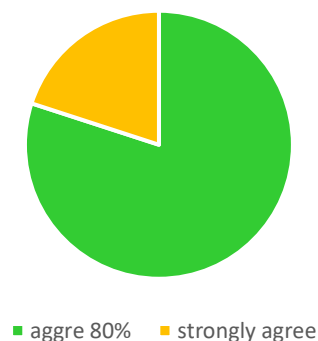
The participants indicated that their speaking fluency has notably improved, as they have demonstrated a strong commitment and determination to learn through the use of the Elsa Speak app. Menurut Guo and Wang (2022) Intention is one of the important factors in learning. If from the beginning you do not have the intention, the results of learning will not produce maximum results. In addition to intention, the factor of increasing user fluency is due to motivation. Motivation also greatly contributes to all learning learning processes in line with what Rahmi and Neviyarni (2022) said Motivation acts as an effort enhancer and realizes the expected results of the goals to be achieved, with the motivation to learn will make students more enthusiastic and more active in participating in the learning process. Motivation also functions as an amplifier for students to achieve achievement

because effort must be driven by a strong desire. So with learning motivation, students can prepare what will be done to achieve the goals they want to achieve.

The participants also said that they made many new friends from the Elsa Speak app. This is because the Elsa Speak app uses advanced technology so that it can communicate with outsiders. This is in line with T I Prasojo, A M Mufid, M R Fadliansyah (2021) By joining the discord server, we can meet and get to know and chat with people from other countries not only Indonesia. In addition to honing our English skills, we can also make new friends because we are part of a community/server where we can meet thousands of people in one server. This is possible because the servers we join are not only from English learning servers but also from fandom servers. Because when joining a fandom, learning English servers, or other large servers like that not only come from people from the user's country but also from other countries.

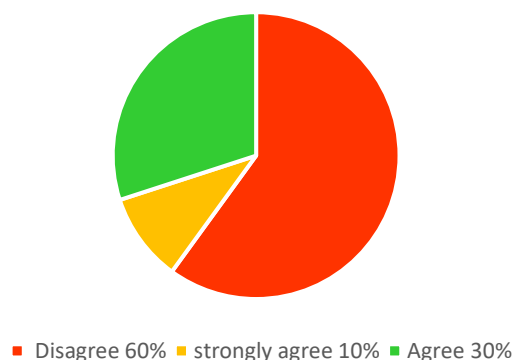
Participants' questionnaire results regarding their perceptions of the Elsa application

Do you use the Elsa app to learn to speak, especially in pronunciation?



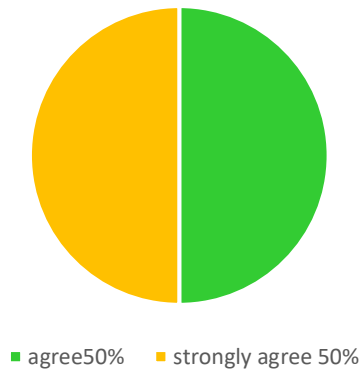
In response to question number one "Do you use the Elsa App to learn Speaking especially in pronunciation" the results showed that 80% agreed and 20% strongly agreed that they use the Elsa app to learn speaking. from the questionnaire results it can be concluded that they use the Elsa application to learn to speak.

Do you find the Elsa app easy to use



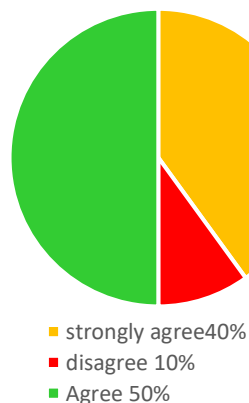
From the diagram above related to "Do you find the Elsa app easy to use" there are 60% disagree because they have little difficulty in using the Elsa application. But there are 30% agree and 10% strongly agree regarding the ease of using the Elsa application. So the level of difficulty and ease of use of the Elsa application depends on each person.

Do you find the Elsa app effective in helping you learn English?



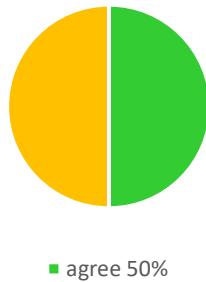
From the diagram above related to "Do you feel the Elsa application is effective to help you learn English?" there are 50% agree and 50% strongly agree, which means that the Elsa application is effective in helping the English language learning process.

Are you satisfied with the content available on the Elsa app?



From the diagram above related to "Are you satisfied with the content available in the Elsa application" there are 50% agree and 40% strongly agree which means that this Elsa application has very interesting features and certainly to provide satisfaction to users. but there is 10% disagree about Elsa's content that makes users satisfied. because different users have different tastes.

Would you recommend the Elsa app to others?



From the diagram above related to "Would you recommend the Elsa application to others?" there are 50% agree and 50% strongly agree. Meaning that they feel a positive impact from the Elsa application and then they want others to also try it to learn English.

From the answers to the overall questionnaire, the author can conclude that the Elsa Speak app has an important role in the process of learning foreign languages for Iain Kudus students. This is evidenced by the results of filling out questionnaires from participants who showed very good results. Participants use the Elsa Speak app in their learning process, then users also say this application is very easy to use not long-winded suitable for all groups, it is also equipped with interesting features and can reduce enthusiasm for users. So it can be concluded that the Elsa app can help the speaking learning process because it is accompanied by interesting features to foster user interest in using it.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study present student perspectives and the benefits of using the Elsa application at the Institut Agama Islam Negri Kudus. Based on the results of data collection, there are several problems faced by Indonesian students in speaking English. Among them are a lack of confidence in students, fear of making mistakes, fear of being said to be pretentious with friends, etc. Along with the times and technological advances, the Elsa Speak app was created specifically for learning to speak. After the author examines the results of questionnaires from IAIN Kudus students, and the results of interviews from Tadris English students in semester 3, it can be concluded that the use of the elsa application has proven to be very helpful and contributes to the process of improving their speaking skills because elsa is equipped with interesting features that make them feel comfortable during the learning process. elsa speak app has a myriad of benefits that can be felt by users, including elsa app can help increased confidence in communication and help master pronunciation problems also elsa speak app provides many relationships not only in different regions but different countries.

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