

EXPLORING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN PRONUNCIATION LEARNING THROUGH ELSA SPEAK

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Abstract

Low engagement in English pronunciation learning is a common challenge among elementary school students in the English classroom due to the English Foreign Language (EFL) context. In the EFL context, students have limited exposure to the English language and have minimal opportunities to practice English. Pronunciation learning can be difficult for elementary school students, particularly when the English activities are not designed to actively involve students in the learning process. The use of AI-based tools may provide a more interactive approach to support students' learning. ELSA Speak is one of the AI-based tools used to support students' pronunciation learning. It provides real-time pronunciation feedback, a user-friendly interface, and interactivity. This study explores how students' engagement in learning pronunciation through the use of ELSA Speak. The study uses a qualitative approach and involves the fifth-grade students as the participants. Data will be collected through observations, field notes, and students' responses during pronunciation learning activities. The results of this study showed that ELSA Speak helped students become more engaged in learning pronunciation. Through its interactive features and pronunciation feedback, the application encouraged students to participate more actively, practice pronunciation repeatedly, and become more confident during English learning activities. In addition, the study highlighted that AI-based learning tools such as ELSA Speak can support a more interesting and interactive learning environment, especially for elementary school students in learning pronunciation. This study emphasizes the capabilities of AI-based tools in supporting more engaging learning experiences in learning English, especially in learning pronunciation.

Keywords – Artificial Intelligence; Pronunciation; ELSA Speak

Introduction

Pronunciation plays a key role in English learning for elementary students, as it serves as the foundation for developing speaking skills. Scott Thornbury (2005) argues that pronunciation is a crucial part of speaking because it influences how others understand what we say. Therefore, English learning for young learners should focus not only on vocabulary and grammar but also on pronunciation and classroom engagement. This ensures that young learners are trained to speak English with correct pronunciation from an early age, enabling them to communicate clearly and participate actively in class. However, for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speakers, young learners experience difficulties with English pronunciation, which affects their low levels of engagement in the English learning

process. Traditional teaching methods are associated with these problems because they fail to provide sufficient support for pronunciation practice. For example, teacher-centered instruction can make lessons feel monotonous and uninteresting for young learners.

To address these issues, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and artificial intelligence (AI) has become an innovative way to use English as the media for learning. ICT can make the learning environment rich in multimedia and interactive. Meanwhile, AI makes learning flexible, interactive, and personalized. UNESCO (2023) states that digital technology, when used effectively, can increase student engagement in the learning process and improve their learning outcomes. One example of AI-

based learning media is ELSA Speak. ELSA Speak is an AI-based mobile application that uses speech recognition and provides real-time feedback. ELSA Speak is available on the App Store and Play Store.

A study of Vietnamese students (2026) found that 77.3% of students experienced improved pronunciation after using ELSA Speak, and 81.8% experienced increased self-confidence. Based on this study, there is a research gap on the integration of ICT and AI, specifically the ELSA Speak, as an English learning media, especially for young learners. Most previous research has focused on older learners.

Based on the previous studies, this study focuses on exploring students' engagement in pronunciation learning through ELSA Speak. Therefore, the research question of this study is:

“How do students engage in pronunciation learning through the use of ELSA Speak?”

This study contributes to the development of knowledge in English language teaching and learning, especially in the integration of AI-based media in learning pronunciation among elementary school students. This study also enriches the understanding of the integration of AI-based media in learning pronunciation and students' engagement and can be used as the foundation for developing conceptual frameworks for AI-supported English learning for elementary school students.

Methodology

This study uses a case study approach that aims to explore in depth the experiences and involvement of young learners in pronunciation learning through the use of the ELSA Speak application.

The participants in this study were all fifth-grade elementary school students at SDN 091482 Kasindir. The research sample consisted of one class with 13 students. Participants were those who participated in

pronunciation learning using the ELSA Speak application.

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a method of selecting participants based on predetermined criteria. In this study, the participants were young learners who attended pronunciation lessons using the ELSA Speak application. Data collection using qualitative methods included:

1. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with young learners to determine their experiences and responses using the ELSA Speak application.

2. Observations

Observations were conducted during the pronunciation learning process to assess student engagement.

3. Documentation

Documentation in this study included field notes, photographs, and audio recordings that demonstrated the young learners' engagement during pronunciation learning.

The data analysis in this study used thematic analysis, with the following steps:

1. Collecting and transcribing interview data.
2. Coding as part of the data processing process.
3. Grouping codes into specific categories or themes.
4. Interpreting the analysis results to answer the research problem formulation.

The procedure of this study consisted of several steps. First, the researcher identified and selected the participants of the study. Second, classroom observations were carried out to explore the students' pronunciation learning activities through the use of ELSA Speak. During the observation process, the researcher wrote field notes to record important events and students' responses during the learning activities. Next, the researcher interviewed the students to get more information about their opinions and experiences when they

used ELSA Speak during the pronunciation learning process. In addition, several documents, including photographs, screenshots, and field notes, were gathered as supporting data for the research. The collected data were then interpreted descriptively, and the researcher made conclusions based on the results of the study.

Finding and Discussion

Finding

These findings related to the use of ELSA Speak in exploring students' engagement during the pronunciation learning process. The data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis in this study applied thematic analysis by collecting and transcribing interview data, coding as part of the data processing process, grouping codes into specific categories or themes, and interpreting the analysis results to answer the research problem formulation. The findings were focused on exploring the students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in using ELSA Speak for pronunciation learning.

After analyzing the data from the interviews and classroom observations, the researcher found several main themes related to the students' opinions about ELSA Speak during the pronunciation learning process, students' participation in the classroom, their motivation during the learning process, and several challenges found during the implementation process.

1. Students' opinions about ELSA Speak during the pronunciation learning process
2. Students' participation in the classroom
3. Their motivation during the learning process
4. Several challenges were found during the implementation process

The themes are presented and discussed in detail below.

1. Students' opinions about ELSA Speak during the pronunciation learning process

Based on interview findings, most fifth-grade students expressed positive perceptions toward the implementation of ELSA Speak in the pronunciation learning process. They perceived the application as interesting, enjoyable, and helped them learn how to pronounce English words correctly. During the learning activities, they appeared more enthusiastic and engaged when the teacher used the application to teach pronunciation.

Many students explained that learning pronunciation with ELSA Speak could help them listen to the pronunciation directly and practice by themselves. Although the learning process used only one smartphone owned by the teacher, the students were still actively engaged through group practice and using the application in turns with their classmates.

Some students mentioned that the application helped them learn how to say English words correctly. They could listen to the pronunciation many times, which helped them to imitate the pronunciation accurately. Some students also said that they liked the voice in the application because they could follow it easily. They also stated that they were enjoyable because the application felt similar to a game and gave scores after each exercise. The scoring feature motivated students to continue practicing their pronunciation skills.

The documentation data also supported these findings. Several photos and screenshots taken during the learning process showed students using the application enthusiastically. Most students were actively participating and appeared interested in the pronunciation exercises provided by the application.

These findings indicate that students generally had positive perceptions of ELSA Speak as the learning media for pronunciation practice. The interactive features, instant feedback, and audio support contributed to students' interest and enjoyment during the learning process.

2. Students' Participation during the Learning Process

Based on classroom observations, the students actively participated in the learning process. Before using the application, some students were less active during pronunciation practice. They were sometimes afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of their classmates. However, after using ELSA Speak, the students became more involved in classroom activities.

The observation results showed that the students listened carefully to the pronunciation audio from the application and repeated the words several times. Many students practiced the pronunciation activities by themselves without being told many times by the teacher. Some students also became excited to get better pronunciation scores than their friends.

Students' participation could also be seen from their interaction with the teacher and classmates. During the lesson, students often asked about difficult words and helped their friends practice pronunciation. Some students also talked about their pronunciation scores with their classmates.

In addition, students became braver to speak English in front of the class. Some students who were shy at the beginning slowly became more confident in practicing English pronunciation. This showed that ELSA Speak helped students participate more actively during the learning activities.

The interview data were in line with the classroom observations. One of the

students explained that the application made speaking activities easier because they had a chance to practice on their own before talking in front of the class. Another student mentioned that they were interested in practicing more often in order to improve their results in the application. Students' active participation was also shown through their learning behavior in class. During the observation, many students repeated the pronunciation exercises several times until they were happy with their results. This showed that students were interested and involved in the learning process.

In addition, the implementation of ELSA Speak helped make the classroom activities more engaging. Even though the application was only accessed through the teacher's smartphone, the students remained actively involved by practicing the pronunciation tasks one by one. The use of the application also increased students' attention during the lesson and helped them feel more confident in saying English words correctly.

3. Students' Motivation in Learning Pronunciation

The third theme found in this study was students' motivation during pronunciation learning activities. Based on the interview and observation results, the use of ELSA Speak helped increase students' motivation in learning English pronunciation.

During the classroom activities, many students looked excited when using the application. They listened carefully to the instructions, completed the pronunciation tasks actively, and tried to pronounce the difficult words again after receiving feedback from the application and the teacher. Compared to the usual pronunciation activities in class, students seemed more interested and enthusiastic when the teacher used technology in the lesson.

There were several reasons why students became more motivated during the learning process. One reason was that the application gave direct feedback after students practiced pronunciation. The students could immediately know whether their pronunciation was correct or still needed improvement. This made students want to practice more and get better results.

Another reason was the scoring feature in the application. Many students felt happy and proud when they received good scores. At the same time, students who got lower scores tried to repeat the exercises so they could improve their results. Some students even became excited to get higher scores than before. During the interview, one student said that learning pronunciation with ELSA Speak was enjoyable because they could see their progress after practicing. Another student explained that the application made them want to keep trying so they could get better scores each time they practiced.

The fun features in the application also helped increase students' motivation. Many students said that the application was fun because it looked like a game. The colorful display, pronunciation exercises, and scoring system made the learning activities more enjoyable and less boring for the students.

Students' confidence also influenced their motivation. When students received positive feedback and good scores from the application, they became more confident in speaking English. Because of this, they were more willing to participate in pronunciation practice during the lesson.

Overall, the findings showed that ELSA Speak helped create a more enjoyable and motivating learning environment for elementary school students. The interactive features, direct feedback, and fun learning activities encouraged students

to become more motivated in learning English pronunciation.

4. Challenges during the Implementation of ELSA Speak

The researcher found several challenges during the implementation process. These challenges were related to technical issues, students' language ability, and classroom management.

One of the main challenges observed during the learning process was students' difficulty in understanding certain English instructions in the application. Since elementary school students still had limited vocabulary knowledge, some of them needed additional explanations from the teacher to understand the tasks properly.

Another challenge involved pronunciation difficulties. Some students struggled to pronounce unfamiliar English sounds correctly. Even after several attempts, certain students still found it difficult to achieve high pronunciation scores from the application.

During the interviews, some students stated that the application sometimes failed to recognize their voices accurately. As a result, students had to repeat the pronunciation exercises many times. This situation occasionally caused frustration among students, especially when they believed they had pronounced the words correctly.

Technical problems were also identified during classroom observation. Internet connection issues sometimes interrupted the learning process and slowed down the application performance. In addition, one limitation of this study was the limited availability of devices, since the application could only be accessed through the teacher's smartphone during the learning activities.

Managing the classroom was also considered a challenge during the implementation of the application. As the activities relied on the teacher's smartphone, the students needed to use the

application in turns. Therefore, the teacher had to organize the lesson time properly to make sure every student could participate in the pronunciation practice.

Another challenge was related to students' different levels of pronunciation ability. Some students were able to follow the pronunciation exercises easily, while others still needed additional guidance from the teacher. Therefore, the teacher had to provide extra support and repeat instructions during the learning activities.

Despite these challenges, the teacher attempted to overcome the problems by providing guidance, repeating explanations, and motivating students during the learning process. The teacher also encouraged collaborative learning by asking students to help each other during pronunciation activities.

The findings indicate that although ELSA Speak offers many benefits in pronunciation learning, successful implementation still depends on technical support, teacher guidance, and classroom management strategies.

5. The Role of the Teacher during the Learning Process

The final theme identified in this study was the important role of the teacher in supporting the implementation of ELSA Speak in the classroom. Based on the observation results, the teacher played a significant role as a facilitator, motivator, and guide during the learning process.

The teacher first introduced students to the application and explained how to use its features properly. Since elementary school students were still unfamiliar with some aspects of the application, teacher guidance was necessary to help students operate the application effectively.

During classroom activities, the teacher monitored students' progress and provided assistance whenever students encountered difficulties. For example, when students struggled with pronunciation or did not understand certain instructions, the teacher

gave direct explanations and pronunciation examples.

The teacher also motivated students to continue practicing even when they made mistakes. Positive reinforcement, such as praise and encouragement, helped students feel more comfortable and confident during pronunciation practice.

Moreover, the teacher played an important role in creating a supportive classroom environment. The teacher encouraged students to appreciate each other's efforts and avoid mocking classmates who made pronunciation mistakes. As a result, students felt safer and more confident participating in pronunciation activities.

The interview results revealed that students appreciated the teacher's support during the learning process. Several students mentioned that teacher assistance helped them understand difficult words and use the application more effectively.

In addition, the teacher used students' pronunciation results from the application as evaluation material. By observing students' performance, the teacher could identify common pronunciation difficulties and adjust future teaching activities accordingly.

These findings demonstrate that technology alone is not sufficient to ensure successful learning outcomes. Teacher involvement remains essential in guiding, motivating, and supporting students throughout the learning process. The integration of ELSA Speak with effective teacher support contributed significantly to students' engagement in pronunciation learning.

Discussion

This study was conducted to explore how fifth-grade students engaged in learning pronunciation through the use of ELSA Speak. The data from interviews, observations, and documentation showed that the application gave positive influence on students during the learning process. The discussion focuses on students' views about the application, their participation in

class activities, their motivation in learning pronunciation, and the challenges faced during the implementation.

The findings revealed that most students had positive responses toward the use of ELSA Speak in the classroom. The students felt that the application was enjoyable and helped them practice pronunciation more easily. This result shows that elementary school students are more interested in learning activities when technology is included in the lesson. Compared to traditional pronunciation practice, the application created a learning atmosphere that was more interactive and enjoyable for the students.

Before the application was used, pronunciation learning mostly depended on teacher explanation and repetition activities. Students usually listened to the teacher and repeated the words together. In this situation, some students became passive because they did not have many chances to practice individually. After using ELSA Speak, students could listen to pronunciation examples directly from the application and practice by themselves. This gave students more opportunities to learn actively during the lesson.

The audio feature became one of the parts students liked most. Many students said that listening to the pronunciation several times helped them understand how English words should sound. By replaying the audio, students could practice more comfortably and try to improve their pronunciation step by step. For young learners, repetition is important because it helps them remember and understand new language more easily.

Another interesting finding was related to the students' enjoyment during the learning process. Several students mentioned that the application felt similar to a game because it provided scores after each activity. This made students feel excited during pronunciation practice. The use of colorful displays, interactive exercises, and scoring systems helped students enjoy the lesson more. Since

elementary school students generally enjoy playful activities, the game-like features in the application supported their interest in learning.

Besides students' opinions, this study also found improvements in students' participation during classroom activities. Before using the application, some students were shy and did not want to speak English in front of the class. They were afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at by their classmates. However, after the implementation of ELSA Speak, students became more active during pronunciation practice.

This change happened because students had time to practice independently before speaking in front of others. They could repeat the pronunciation exercises many times until they felt more confident. As a result, students slowly became braver to participate in pronunciation activities. This finding shows that technology-based learning can help students feel more comfortable during language learning activities.

The classroom observations also showed that students participated actively during the lesson. They listened carefully to the pronunciation audio, repeated the words several times, and checked the results from the application. Some students even compared their scores with friends and tried to improve their performance. This situation made the classroom atmosphere more active and lively.

Students' participation was not only shown through pronunciation practice but also through interaction with classmates and the teacher. During the lesson, students asked questions about difficult words and sometimes helped their friends practice pronunciation. This interaction created a collaborative learning environment where students learned together and supported each other during activities.

The findings also showed that the use of ELSA Speak created a more student-centered learning atmosphere in the classroom. Even though only the teacher had access to a smartphone, the students were still actively involved in pronunciation practice activities. During the lesson, students took turns practicing words and sentences using the application under the teacher's guidance. They were also able to repeat the pronunciation several times to improve their accuracy. As a result, the students became more engaged and participated more actively in the learning process. Another important result of this study was related to students' motivation. The observations showed that students were more enthusiastic during English lessons when the application was used. They paid attention to instructions, completed pronunciation exercises actively, and kept practicing difficult words. This indicates that ELSA Speak increased students' motivation in learning pronunciation.

One factor that influenced students' motivation was the direct feedback from the application. After practicing pronunciation, students could immediately see whether their pronunciation was correct or not. This feedback helped students know their mistakes and encouraged them to try again. For elementary school students, immediate feedback is useful because it helps them learn in a clearer and more direct way.

The scoring system also became an important source of motivation. Students felt happy when they received good scores from the application. At the same time, students who got lower scores often repeated the exercises to improve their results. Some students even challenged themselves to get better scores than before. This finding suggests that rewards and scores can encourage students to become more active in learning activities.

The enjoyable learning environment also supported students' motivation. Many

students described the application as fun and not boring. This is important because elementary school students usually lose focus quickly if classroom activities are monotonous. Through interactive activities and technology, students stayed interested during the lesson and became more willing to participate.

Students' confidence also influenced their motivation during the learning process. The positive feedback and pronunciation scores from the application helped students feel more confident when speaking English. As students became more confident, they also became more active during classroom activities. This shows that confidence and motivation are connected in language learning. Students who feel confident are usually more willing to participate and practice.

Although the implementation of ELSA Speak gave many positive results, the study also found several challenges during the learning process. One challenge was related to students' understanding of the English instructions in the application. Since the participants were fifth-grade students, some of them still had limited vocabulary knowledge. Because of this, students sometimes needed help from the teacher to understand the instructions correctly.

Another challenge was pronunciation difficulty. Some English sounds were unfamiliar to students, so they needed more time to pronounce the words correctly. Even after repeating the exercises several times, some students still found certain words difficult. This finding shows that pronunciation learning needs continuous practice, especially for young learners.

Technical problems also appeared during the implementation process. Internet connection issues sometimes interrupted classroom activities and affected the

application performance. In addition, the learning activities were limited because only the teacher had access to a smartphone to operate the application. As a result, students had to take turns practicing pronunciation, which sometimes made the learning process take more time and reduced the effectiveness of classroom activities.

The findings further showed that the teacher had an important role during the implementation of ELSA Speak. The teacher acted as a guide and facilitator during the lesson. The teacher explained how to use the application, helped students understand difficult words, and gave examples of pronunciation when needed. The teacher also encouraged students during pronunciation practice. Praise and positive support helped students feel more confident and comfortable while speaking English. As a result, students became less afraid of making mistakes in front of others.

Moreover, the teacher helped students solve both technical and learning difficulties during the lesson. When students had problems with the application or pronunciation exercises, the teacher provided guidance and explanations. Since the participants were elementary school students, teacher support was still very important during the learning process.

Overall, the findings of this study show that ELSA Speak helped improve students' engagement in pronunciation learning. The application supported students in becoming more active, motivated, confident, and interested during English lessons. The interactive features, pronunciation feedback, and enjoyable activities created positive learning experiences for the students.

However, the success of the learning process did not depend only on the application itself. Teacher guidance, classroom management, and technical support were also important factors during

implementation. Technology can support learning activities, but the teacher still plays an important role in helping students learn effectively.

In conclusion, the use of ELSA Speak gave positive contributions to pronunciation learning among fifth-grade elementary school students. The application helped students practice pronunciation in a more enjoyable and interactive way, while also encouraging greater participation and motivation during classroom activities.

Conclusions

This study was conducted to explore how fifth-grade elementary school students engaged in learning pronunciation by using ELSA Speak. The study applied a qualitative method, and the data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. The collected data were then analysed using thematic analysis to find the main themes related to students' experiences during the pronunciation learning activities.

The results of the study showed that ELSA Speak gave positive effects on students' engagement in learning pronunciation. Most students shared positive responses toward the application because they felt that it was fun, interesting, and useful for helping them practice English pronunciation. Features such as audio pronunciation, interactive activities, and pronunciation scores made the learning process more enjoyable for elementary school students.

The findings also showed that students became more active during the learning process after the application was introduced in the classroom. Students participated more during pronunciation activities, practiced independently, and became braver to speak English in front of the class. The opportunity to repeat pronunciation exercises many times helped students feel more confident while learning.

Besides improving participation, the application also increased students' motivation in learning pronunciation. During the lessons, students looked more enthusiastic and interested in practicing English pronunciation. The feedback and scoring features encouraged students to keep practicing and improve their results. In addition, the game-like design of the application helped create a learning atmosphere that was more enjoyable and less monotonous for the students.

Even though the application gave many positive impacts, several challenges were still found during the implementation process. Some students had difficulties understanding English instructions and pronouncing unfamiliar words correctly. Technical issues such as unstable internet connection and limited device performance also sometimes disturbed the learning activities. Moreover, teacher supervision was needed to make sure students stayed focused while using smartphones or tablets in class.

The study further showed that the teacher had an important role during the use of ELSA Speak in the classroom. Teacher guidance, encouragement, and assistance helped students use the application properly and participate actively during the lesson. This indicates that technology cannot completely replace the teacher's role, but it can support the learning process when combined with effective teacher guidance.

In conclusion, the study found that ELSA Speak can support pronunciation learning for elementary school students in a positive way. The application helped students become more active, motivated, and confident during English learning activities, especially in practicing pronunciation.

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