

The Effect of Elsa Speak for Increasing Speaking Ability in Junior High School at SMPN 4 Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of the ELSA Speak application on improving the speaking ability of eighth-grade students at SMPN 4 Bengkulu. The background of this research arises from students' low speaking performance due to conventional teaching methods, limited speaking practice, and insufficient integration of technology in English instruction. The study employed a quasi-experimental method using a Non-Equivalent Control Group Design, involving two classes and a total of 68 students. The speaking test instrument assessed fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and linguistic complexity. The findings revealed a significant improvement in the experimental class using ELSA Speak, with the average score increasing from 55.88 to 68.76. Meanwhile, the control class increased from 55.00 to 62.41. The independent sample t-test obtained a significance value of $0.022 < 0.05$, confirming that ELSA Speak had a significant effect on student speaking ability. Therefore, ELSA Speak is proven to be an effective technology-based learning tool for enhancing students' speaking skills at the junior high school level.

Keywords: *Elsa Speak, speaking ability, learning technology, English education.*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability is a fundamental component in mastering English as a foreign language, especially at the junior high school level. Many Indonesian students face difficulties in oral communication because teaching practices are overly focused on reading and grammar, thereby minimizing opportunities for speaking practice. This situation aligns with Richards, who stated that the lack of exposure to authentic communication and the dominance of text-based methods hinder the speaking skills of EFL learners (Richards, 2008). Furthermore, Brown adds that this major challenge is exacerbated by students' low self-confidence, limited opportunities for practice, and a learning environment that does not support the active use of English (Brown, 2007).

The similar phenomenon is revealed by Harmer, who highlights that school curricula often neglect speaking instruction and instead place greater emphasis on reading and writing skills. This results in students' limited ability to participate in both formal and informal conversations, even though speaking skills are an important indicator of language proficiency in a global context (Harmer, 2019).

As technology advances, artificial intelligence-based innovations such as the English Language Speech Assistant (Elsa Speak) application are beginning to be used as a solution to overcome these obstacles. This application allows students to practice pronunciation, intonation, and sentence structure independently with accurate automatic feedback. A number of studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of this application. Masekan et al. found a significant improvement in the speaking skills of

eighth-grade students, from a score of 58.26 to 81.47, after using Elsa Speak (Masekan et al., 2024). Another study by Aswaty and Indari showed that the use of this application resulted in a t-value of 10.619, indicating a significant effect on the speaking skills of eleventh-grade students (Aswaty & Indari, 2022).

Furthermore, research by Nurillah and Indari confirms that the application not only improves pronunciation and intonation but also increases students' confidence in speaking (Nurillah, A., & Indari, 2021). Similar findings were also shown by Putri et al., who stated that the Elsa Speak application had a significant effect on the speaking skills of eighth-grade students at SMPN 4 Cijaku in the 2023/2024 academic year (Putri et al., 2024). These findings are further reinforced by Saizu et al., who assert that the interactive features in the application help improve pronunciation and provide an enjoyable learning experience, even though some technical obstacles such as audio response and certain locked features are still found (Saizu et al., 2024).

In addition to its effectiveness, the use of Elsa Speak also provides a more personalized and adaptive learning experience. This is evidenced by Syabina and Rahman, who reported that 96.6% of students felt more confident after using this application, 93.4% experienced an increase in vocabulary, and 100% of students acknowledged an improvement in grammar related to speaking skills (Syabina & Rahman Hz, 2024). Based on these findings, the use of Elsa Speak is seen as a relevant and potential alternative to improve the speaking ability of students at SMPN 4 Bengkulu. The learning environment at this school reflects the common challenges faced by many schools in Indonesia, namely low student motivation, limited learning time, and suboptimal use of technology.

Therefore, research on the impact of this application is expected to provide a more comprehensive empirical picture of its effectiveness in English language learning. Overall, this research is urgent in order to respond to the need for innovative learning media that can improve students' speaking skills through a more interactive, independent, and learner-centered approach. By utilizing AI-based features, the Elsa Speak application has the potential to make a significant contribution to improving students' pronunciation, fluency, and confidence in communicating in English.

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental Non-Equivalent Control Group Design to test the effect of using the ELSA Speak application on the speaking ability of students at SMPN 4 Bengkulu. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on cause-effect relationships through the administration of a pre-test, treatment, and post-test to two different groups. According to Creswell, quantitative research aims to test theories by measuring variables numerically and analyzing data through systematic statistical procedures (Creswell, 2012). Meanwhile, a quasi-experimental design is used because group selection is not carried out by full randomization, as explained by Sugiyono, who states that this design is appropriate when the available classes have already been formed previously (Sugiyono, 2020).

The research instrument consisted of a speaking ability test that assessed the aspects of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and complexity based on the framework

described by (Skehan, 1996). The instrument's quality was tested through a validity test which produced 18 valid items out of 30 items tested, and a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha which showed the instrument was above the minimum threshold of 0.532 and therefore declared reliable. In addition, an item difficulty test was conducted showing that the majority of items fell into the moderate category (41–70%), and an item discrimination test based on the Gronlund index was used to ensure each item could effectively distinguish students.

The research procedure consisted of three main stages, namely pre-test, treatment, and post-test. The pre-test was given to both classes to measure the students' initial abilities. Next, in the treatment stage, the experimental class was taught using the Elsa Speak application, while the control class learned using conventional methods without the help of the application. The material provided included self-introduction, work, education, and simple dialogues in accordance with the junior high school curriculum. After the treatment was completed, a post-test was given to both classes to measure improvements in speaking ability. The collected data were then analyzed using tests of normality and homogeneity, a paired-sample t-test, an independent-sample t-test, and effect size calculations using Partial Eta Squared.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study involved two classes: VIII.4 as the experimental class and VIII.1 as the control class, each consisting of 34 students. Both classes took a pre-test and a post-test to measure improvements in speaking ability after the treatment. Based on the experimental class's pre-test results, the students' initial average score was 55.88, with a score range of 39–83. After receiving treatment using the Elsa Speak application, the average post-test score increased to 68.76, with a range of 50–89. This increase indicates a fairly significant improvement in speaking ability after using the application. In the control class, which used conventional teaching methods, the average pre-test score was 55.00 and rose to 62.41 on the post-test. Although there was an improvement, the score increase in the control class was lower compared to the experimental class.

The Shapiro–Wilk normality test results showed that the pre-test and post-test data in both classes were normally distributed > 0.05 , thus meeting the requirements for conducting parametric tests. Furthermore, the homogeneity of variance test showed significance values of 0.509 (pre-test) and 0.204 (post-test), respectively, so it can be concluded that the variances of the two groups are homogeneous. The independent sample t-test showed that the t-value = 2.338 with a significance of 0.022, which is less than 0.05. These results indicate a significant difference between the post-test scores of the two groups. In addition, the F-test analysis produced an F value of 5.467 with a significance of 0.022 and a Partial Eta Squared value of 0.076, which means that the treatment contributed 7.6% to the students' speaking ability.

Discussion

The significant increase in scores in the experimental class shows that using the Elsa Speak app is effective in improving students' speaking skills. This app provides intensive pronunciation practice, phoneme error detection, intonation assessment, and automatic feedback that makes it easy for students to correct their mistakes independently. These features make the learning process more adaptive and repetitive, giving students the opportunity to continuously practice phonology, fluency, and accuracy. This explains why the score improvement in the experimental class was much more consistent than in the control class, which only used conventional methods.

The findings of this study are also consistent with the results of previous studies. Masekan et al. (2024) reported an increase in scores from 58.26 to 81.47 after using Elsa Speak, while Aswaty & Indari (2022) found a t-value of 10.619, indicating a significant effect on pronunciation and fluency. Putri et al. (2024) also stated that students who used this application had higher post-test scores compared to other methods. Thus, the results of this study reinforce the evidence that Elsa Speak is effective in junior high school English language learning, particularly in improving speaking Ability.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the use of the Elsa Speak application has a significant effect on improving the speaking skills of eighth-grade students at SMPN 4 Bengkulu. The difference in post-test scores between the experimental class (68.76) and the control class (62.41), as well as the results of normality, homogeneity, and t-tests, show that this improvement did not occur by chance but was a direct result of using the Elsa Speak application. Thus, this application has been proven to be effective as a learning medium in improving students' pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy in speaking English.

Further analysis using the F-test (ANCOVA) further strengthened these results. An F value of 5.467, significance of 0.022, and a partial Eta Squared of 0.076 indicate that the treatment contributed positively to a 7.6% improvement in students' speaking skills. Although the level of improvement varied among students, this application generally succeeded in improving the consistency of performance, confidence, and pronunciation quality of students. This proves that ELSA Speak is a technology-based learning innovation that is suitable for implementation in English language teaching in junior high schools.

Overall, this study confirms that the integration of artificial intelligence-based technology such as ELSA Speak can be an effective solution in improving students' speaking skills. These findings open up opportunities for schools and teachers to develop English language learning that is more interactive, adaptive, and tailored to the needs of learners in the digital age.

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