

# Investing EFL Students' Experiences with ELSA as a Digital Tool for Speaking Practice in Satun, Thailand: A Qualitative Study

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## ABSTRACT

The process of learning English in Thailand faces several challenges. One of the aim problems is the lack of opportunities for student to practice speaking English in real situations. This study examines investing EFL students' experiences with ELSA as digital tool for speaking practice. 20 three-grade in junior high school in Muslim Suksa School. The data collected through speaking test and interview. The result shows many students agree about ELSA speak application because the application its effectiveness for them because can use everywhere. ELSA speak make the student more confidently. They can also find out how good their English-speaking skills are. The study concludes that students in Thailand enjoy using the Elsa application and they also have experience using the Elsa application.

**Keywords:** *Investing, EFL, Elsa Speak, Speaking Practice , Digital Tool*

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## INTRODUCTION

English is taught as a foreign language and students are encouraged to practice speaking it within their level of global language proficiency (Aizawa, et al., 2021).. In addition to the ELSA speak application, AI technology really widely used. Hopefully, the ELSA speak application uses AI to provide pronunciation practice, providing a promising tool to improve pronunciation skills. It is widely known that Indonesia is one of the many countries that use English as foreign language, Students use English as Foreign Language (EFL) most often difficult to learn English. It is not used by those who speak English as their first language. The language that students use in everyday life. This makes it difficult for all students to pronounce all English vocabulary. One of is to present Student in Thai the application resources they can use in the form of English learning media.

The issue is many students in Thailand only learn English in school and do not have opportunity to practice speaking with native speaker or in authentic situations, In addition English teaching methods in Thailand focus in grammar and do not emphasize skills. Many students can understand English grammar and vocabulary, but have difficulty speaking fluently and confidently. Therefore, efforts need to be made to in improve English speaking practice among Thai students, such as increasing opportunities to practice speaking with native speaker or using technology to speaking English practice.

In addition, The advanced voice recognition technology was announced to be available through ELSA learning told instant feedback and pronunciation adjustments are available, enabling students to enhance their proficiency, More efficiently (Sholekhah & Fakhurriana, 2023). According to some previous studies, the use of AI in learning applications, especially

the language is considered to be effective enough to increase the user's ability. An example is the use of PaperRater as an artificial intelligence tool that can help users improve their English ability.

### *Speaking Practice*

Speaking is one of the core skills in English learning. It is the most important and practical ability to be mastered, as it is necessary for conversations, work, and other daily activities. Communication is the act of speaking, which involves a person engaging in conversation with another. Therefore, speaking must become part of our daily exercises. In practicing English conversation, learners often face difficulties because the environment does not support their speaking practice process. According to Prayudha and Pradana (2023), students often feel anxious when speaking in English because they are afraid of making errors. As a result, they tend to avoid practicing. To overcome this, students need regular speaking practice to improve their understanding, use appropriate intonation, and develop better English-speaking ability. There are five components in speaking practice:

### *Pronunciation*

Pronunciation is an important form of learning complete in teaching English. Teaching in English with phonemes (sound of words) and a slightly difficult pronunciation for students. The way it is pronounced is considered significant. The language is becoming a crucial components of education to equip individuals the communication skills required by students because the English pronunciation of is Influenced by their nationally, leading to incorrectness or misinterpretation (Putra and Sujarwati, 2023). The use of vowels is essential for pronouncing English, and it can be learned by focusing on consonants as well (Hidayah, et al., 2021). The pronunciation of the letters in both voice and words. The placement of these different on syllables can greatly alter their meaning and context. In the end, the words modify the intended meaning (Kobilova, 2022).

In addition, Hancock explained that pronunciation teaches often implies that teachers play a model to imitate students, This indicate that pronunciation is an activity in which teacher has shown for students. This means that pronunciation is a type of exercise in which teachers provide students with the language after that the students were able to pronounce words or sentences with accuracy interactive nature of this application students who are motivated and invest in their pronunciation in their pronunciation of (Wahid, 2022). According to (Khoris, 2022) research who focused on improving students pronunciation in qualitative methods.

### *Fluency*

Fluency many refers ability to speak or a write language easily, well and quickly with smoothness, and without many pauses. Means te ability to liquid, quickly, and easily to use te language to effectively communicate, wheather they are spoken or write. It is not only about the speed. But also the easy and success of communication between the speaker and listener, which makes th interaction natural and easy to understand.

### *Vocabulary*

Vocabulary can be classified into different types depending on the use, including listening to vocabulary (words we understand when they are heard), speak vocabulary (words we use in vocabulary), read vocabulary (words used in writing).

### *Grammar*

Grammar is considered to be a system of language ability, explaining how people create and understand sentences in any language. It is different fprm syntax, especially related to the structure of the sentences. Grammar is the basic framework of the rules and principles of one language structure, allowing the speaker and writer to writer and explain meaning accurately.

### *Intonation*

When speaking, intonation refers to a shift in height that conveys the meaning, emotions or voice of someone. It helps listeners understand the attitude of the speaker, whether it is a question or statement, or which words are the, most important.

### *Elsa Speak Application*

The Elsa Speak application is an artificial intelligence tool designed to improve English speaking skills. It offers several features, such as a free online dictionary, voice recognition technology, and pronunciation support. Elsa Speak (English Language Speech Assistant) is an English pronunciation application designed to help users speak clearly and confidently in English (Taqy, 2021). The use of AI technology in the Elsa Speak application is considered quite effective and very useful for improving English, especially in pronunciation. With the integration of AI, the application helps users enhance their speaking skills through various interactive features. The advantages of using this application include improving English skills, increasing vocabulary, learning the exact pronunciation of words, and practicing communication in English (Lieng, 2022).

According to Khoir (2021), the Elsa Speak application can support and improve students' pronunciation skills while also motivating them. He proved this through students' performance and the points collected during practice. Similarly, Akhmad and Munawir (2022) confirmed these results, recording significant improvements in students' pronunciation skills and raising positive awareness about the effectiveness of Elsa Speak.

However, the free version of the application limits access to lessons, often requiring users to wait 24 hours before moving on to the next lesson. Purchasing the premium version removes these restrictions, but it comes with a cost. Despite these limitations, Elsa Speak remains a valuable learning resource. In general, studies show that Elsa is an effective tool for improving pronunciation skills, enhancing learning outcomes, and motivating EFL learners. The Elsa Speak application is strongly recommended for students because it can add their experiences. And it offers some settings and features, including voice recognition technology, research program, free online dictionary, pronunciation and intonation test, and free assessment test throughout the program (Karim et al., 2023, p.655). We can practice and correct our English speech using Elsa Say. by correcting incorrect pronunciation and explaining how to pronounce in English (Akhmad, M., & Munawir, 2022).

The advantages of ELSA Speak include its use of artificial intelligence to assist users in improving word pronunciation skills through automatic voice recognition, which helps analyze and evaluate speech. Students can select topics and access various lessons related to those topics, with each lesson categorized by difficulty level and offering opportunities to practice speaking and listening. Additionally, users can listen to model pronunciations, record their own voices, and receive immediate feedback on correct and incorrect pronunciation, which makes the learning process more interactive and effective (Aswaty, 2022).

On the other hand, the application also has several disadvantages. Students are required to own a smartphone in order to download and use the app, and many of the topics are limited to paid content, which can restrict access for some learners. Moreover, the app needs a stable internet connection to function effectively, and in some cases, it requires a specific accent to maximize its usability. These limitations may pose challenges for students who do not have consistent access to technology or resources (Aswaty, 2022).

*English as a Foreign Language.*

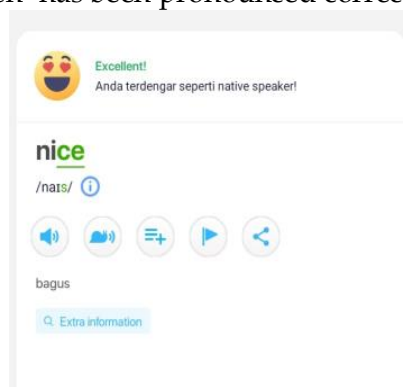
Pronunciation skills are an important meaning for English as a foreign language learners (EFL learners). The ability to communicate clearly and comprehend the language of native English speakers can be influenced by EFL learners. The development of English pronunciation skills is often viewed as important by EFL students in Indonesia is considered a difficult field because English is different from their native pronunciation. Some English sounds do not exist in Indonesia's pronunciation, which makes it difficult for EFL learners. Different dialects are spoken in different parts of Indonesia. EFL learners will be impacted by the variation in dialects and voice to ensure that their foreign languages remain be sound unnatural (Samad & Ismail, 2020). One primary goal of English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction is to improve students' ability to interact with one another, and research by (Alharbi, 2021) shows that interactive project-based learning methods may achieve this goal.

Understanding the religious context in English as a foreign language (EFL) is crucial. Teaches is also emphasized by (Choi & Nunan, 2018),, which maintains that this knowledge can help students use English more effectively and efficiently. Learning with the application

is the most important thing for EFL learners. pronunciation independently using digital applications. Application of digital technology. Learning in EFL will be made easier for the learners, so that their pronunciation can develop. EFL learners' experiences with digital application technology for improving their speaking practice were the focus of this study. The Elsa Say app is being considered as an informal digital learning tool that can assist EFL learners in improving their pronunciation.

#### *Correct Pronunciation*

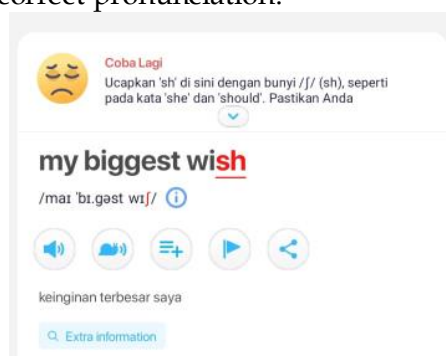
Based on the picture 2.1. Users have declared the word "nice" and the application of his pronunciation is "excellent! Which means it is very good. The text "You look like a native!" Confirm that pronunciation is similar to that of native speakers. Phonetic are also displayed to help users understand the correct pronunciation. This application provides instant comments, indicating that the word spoken has been pronounced correctly.



Picture 2.1. Correct pronunciation

#### *Incorrect Pronunciation*

Display assesses the pronunciation of the word "my biggest wish" in the ELSA Speak. The result of notification showing "try again". which means that the pronunciation is still incorrect. the mistake occurred with the sound. The mistake occurred with the sound "sh" which should be pronounced with the /s/ sound, and the phonetic transcription /ʃ/ is also displayed as a guide for the correct pronunciation.



Picture 2.2 Incorrect Pronunciation

## METHOD

The research focused to the EFL students many have difficulty in developing English Speaking skill the researcher used Elsa Speak AI for now the speaking ability. The researcher was conducted at Muslim Suksa School Junior High School located in Satun Thailand, with 20 people in the class. With 20 student subjects from two classes, namely class 3/4 consisting of 10 female and class 3/1 consisting of 10 males. The reseach used speaking test and interview. The researcher wants to deeply explore and understand the lived experiences of EFL students using ELSA as a digital tool for speaking practice, and involving EFL students who actively use The ELSA speak application for practicing English Speaking. The Researcher took interview data using semi-structured interviews with participants to explore their experiences of ELSA usability, and challenges faced during speaking practice.

#### *Participant*



The Participants in this study 3<sup>rd</sup> grade junior high school in Muslim Suksa school located in Satun Thailand especially in Chalung, Mueang Satun District, Satun 91140. This study placement was selected the predominance of Thai and Maly language in the Satun region of Thailand. The number of research subject is 10 students from two classes, namely class 3/4 consisting of 10 female students and class 3/1 of male students.

#### *Instruments*

Several instruments were used to collect data in this study, including speaking test and interview. The researcher uses a speaking test, which is a research method used to determine a person's the speaking ability in a particular language the first researcher told the students for open the gadget, after that the students open the Elsa Application, they can choose the Elsa features, and then the students can choose speaking test.

Tabel 1. Interview questions

No	Questions
1	What do you feel when you used the Elsa Application?
2	Do you have any difficulty when you used the Elsa application?
3	How your experience when you used Elsa application?
4	Do you feel confused when you used it?
5	Do you feel more comfortable speaking in english after using the Elsa application?
6	Would you recommended using Elsa application to you friend who are also elsa application?
7	Do you have suggestion and feedback when you used Elsa speak?
8	Do you feel confidence when you used ELSA speak?
9	Do you feel satisfied when you use ELSA speak?
10	Does this app make you more motivated to learn english?
11	What are advantages and disadvantages of the Elsa application in your opinion?
12	What do you like about the Elsa application?
13	Do you think Elsa is an effective tool for efl students?why?
14	Are there any parts of ELSA that you find difficult or not helpful.
15	Do the features in the ELSA app, such as conversation topics and pronunciation feedback, help you in learning?
16	What do you think about the AI feedback and scoring system?
17	Was the app easy to understand?
18	Do you think the speaking lessons are suitable for your level?
19	Did using Elsa speak make you more motivaed to practice english?
20	How does Elsa compare to other learning methods you've tried?

#### *Procedures*

Overall, this table describes a series of research or learning activities with the ELSA speak application which are carried out starting from introduction, used the ELSA, speaking test with ELSA, to interviews according to a predetermined schedule.

NO	Activites	Time location				
		13-Aug	16-Aug	19-Aug	20-Aug	23-Aug
1.	Introduce the Elsa Speak					
2.	Use Elsa Speak					
3.	Speaking Test In Elsa					
4.	Interview					

#### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis in this study involved qualitative approaches. Qualitative analysis by speaking test and interview. Speaking test conducted assess an individual's proficiency in speaking and communicating effectively in a specific language, particularly English as supplementary or foreign language. The purpose of this test is to see how well a learner can

use spoken language in real life or academic situations. The researcher interview students want to know from the students about their experiences using Elsa Speak and the difficulties when using the Elsa Speak.

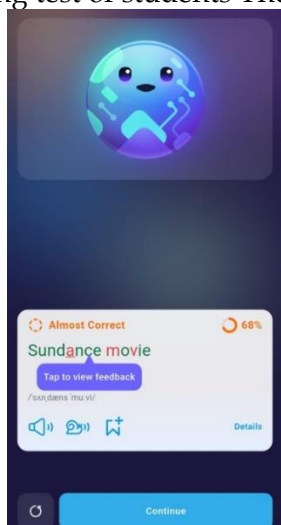
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The level of EFL knowledge among students at Muslim Suka School in Thailand is considered low. Based on the speaking test results, students experienced difficulties in pronunciation, fluency, and confidence, as well as a lack of knowledge in understanding the use of the Elsa application. The process of learning English in Thailand faces several challenges. One of the main problems is the lack of opportunities for students to practice speaking English in real situations. Many Thai students only learn English in school and do not have the opportunity to practice speaking with native speakers or in authentic contexts. In addition, English teaching methods in Thailand often focus too much on grammar and do not emphasize speaking skills. Many students can understand English grammar and vocabulary but still have difficulty speaking fluently and confidently. The lack of English-speaking skills can also affect Thai students' employment opportunities and further study. Therefore, efforts need to be made to improve English-speaking practice among Thai students, such as increasing opportunities to speak with native speakers or using technology-based English practice tools.

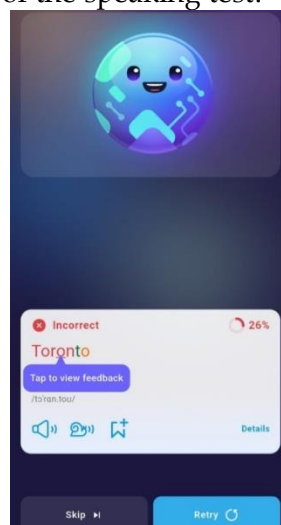
### Discussion

The implementation of English language learning integrated with the Elsa Speak AI application at Muslim Suksa School employed two data collection methods: interviews and speaking tests. First, in conducting interviews, the researcher selected students who had used the ELSA application, then arranged a time and place that suited the participants. The researcher asked about their experiences using ELSA Speak, the difficulties they faced while using the application, the benefits they gained, and suggestions they could provide for improving ELSA Speak. The interview schedule was adjusted to suit the students' availability. After that, the researcher also selected students who had used the ELSA application as a digital tool for speaking practice.

The researcher determines what she wants to know from students about their experiences using ELSA speak. After that, the researcher records the interview result obtained by the students. Then the last researcher used the speaking test, researcher use a speaking test instrument which is a researcher method used to determine a person's speaking ability in a particular language the first researcher told the students for open the gadget after that the students open the elsa speak application, they can choose the elsa fitur's. Based the result of speaking test of students They have an each has the results of the speaking test.



Picture 3.1

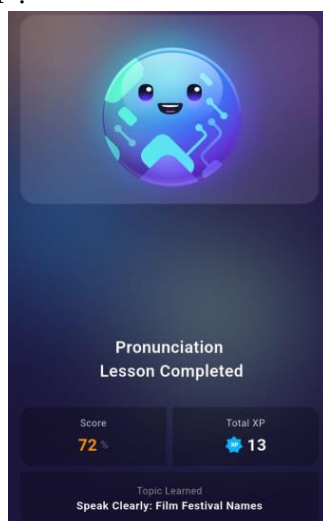


Picture 3.2

The Picture 3.1 Students speak about the "Sundance Movie" but there are is a wrong pronunciation of the letters a,m and V, but from the feedback Elsa Speak says almost correct

so the correct pronunciation is that the letter A should be pronounced with the letter E while the letter M should be pronounced with the word "MU" and the letter V should be pronounced with the word "vi".

The Picture 3.2 students speak about the "Toronto" but there is a wrong pronunciation of letter O and T while the letter O is pronounced with the word A and the letter T there is an additional pronunciation of "tou".



Picture 3.3

### The Result of Speaking Test

After the students make a speaking test there is a result of speaking test based on the picture 3.3 the result speaking test of student is 72%.

Based on the researcher. The student have a result of the questions of interview.

#### Interviewee 1

*"After we learned about the elsa application, Elsa speak can help us in doing homework, especially assignments that have the material pronunciation. In elsa speak, when we speak we can find out which words we have pronounces incorrectly and elsa speak easily correct or incorrect words so that it becomes easier for us to understand.*

According to the results of an interview conducted earlier, technology like a class management system has been found to enhance the dynamics of learners and help them acquire language skills beyond their current abilities. This means that learning English can be improved by using application that provide teachers and students an attractive and pleasant teaching technique, unlike traditional learning methods mainly related to notes, writing and memorizing.

#### Interview 2

*"we really like elsa application. We can practice speaking confidently and we can add our vocabulary that we didn't know before. And with application we can learning activities, become more effective and efficiently.*

Elsa aimed to assist users in recognizing and rectifying errors when they occur. Users can improve their pronunciation with the help of an instant feedback system, which enhances their speed learning. The capacity of Elsa speak was adjusted by the task units to match the user ability. Enabling continuous improvement in speaking abilities. With many options for topics and exercise, learners may still be committed and motivated throughout their learning process.

## CONCLUSIONS

ELSA Speak is an English learning application that uses smart AI and machine learning to detect pronunciation mistakes with an accuracy of more than 95%, providing clear and instant feedback on errors in word articulation, intonation, pitch, and speaking pace. By analyzing how users pronounce words and sentences, the app offers specific and easy-to-understand correction instructions, allowing learners to practice pronunciation similar to

native speakers through a personal tutor accessible anytime and anywhere with just a smartphone and an internet connection. Research shows that ELSA Speak effectively improves both segmental features (such as vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental features (such as stress, tone, length, and sentence rhythm), resulting in better speech clarity, intonation, and overall speaking skills while boosting learners' confidence. In addition, the app helps expand vocabulary and provides progress tracking so users can monitor their improvement over time. However, its limitations include a primary focus on pronunciation with less emphasis on grammar, possible accuracy issues due to accents or microphone quality, and restricted access to advanced features in the free version, which requires a subscription to ELSA Pro.

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