Elsa Speak App Usage in Blended Learning During The Covid-19 Pandemic: Students' Perspectives

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: **ELSA Speak App, Blended Learning, Covid-19 Pandemic, Student's Pronunciation, Students' Perspectives**	*The covid-19 pandemic has brought sudden differences in aspects of human life, including education. Educational institutions had to adapt in a hurry to respond to the situation to avoid the severe effects of learning loss. There are many obstacles in applying blended learning even though the government has reopened schools. One of the ways to overcome it is by using ELSA Speak App for focusing on student's pronunciation. By using questionnaire adopted from Martins, Levis and Borges (2016), 25 students are asked about their perspectives towards the usage of ELSA Speak App in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study revealed that ELSA Speak App is a useful app to be used in learning pronunciation in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.*
	ABSTRAK
Kata Kunci: **ELSA Speak App, Pembelajaran Campuran, Pandemi Covid-19, Pengucapan Siswa, Perspektif Siswa**	Pandemi Covid-19 telah membawa perbedaan mendadak pada aspek kehidupan manusia, termasuk pendidikan. Institusi pendidikan harus cepat beradaptasi untuk merespon situasi tersebut untuk menghindari dampak yang parah dari kehilangan pembelajaran. Banyak kendala dalam menerapkan Pembelajaran Campuran, meskipun pemerintah telah membuka kembali sekolah. Salah satu cara untuk mengatasinya adalah dengan menggunakan ELSA Speak App untuk fokus pada pembelajaran pengucapan siswa. Dengan menggunakan kuesioner yang diadopsi dari Martins, Levis dan Borges (2016), 25 siswa ditanyai tentang perspektif mereka terhadap penggunaan ELSA Speak App dalam Pembelajaran Campuran selama pandemi Covid-19. Kajian ini mengungkapkan bahwa ELSA Speak App merupakan aplikasi yang berguna untuk digunakan dalam pembelajaran pengucapan dalam Pembelajaran Campuran selama masa pandemi Covid-19.
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INTRODUCTION

The covid-19 pandemic has brought sudden differences in aspects of human life, including education. Educational institutions had to adapt in a hurry to respond to the situation to avoid the severe effects of learning loss, a decline in student knowledge and skill (Pier et al., 2021). When the pandemic intervened, the students had severe learning disorders. Teaching/learning face-to-face has been suspended due to the closure of educational institutions. This disturbs the flow of the daily curriculum of the lessons. Possible delays in reopening schools negatively affect

26

their mental state and academic development. Long-term house quarantine causes disruption and degradation of learning and working patterns of student performance, which ultimately leads to increased stress and unstable academic behaviors.

Education systems around the world must face those extreme disruptions because of the emergency policies to decrease the risks of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the highest rank, UNESCO (2020) released a report that nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries, or 94 percent of the world's student population, were impacted by educational institution closures. Given the rapidity of the situation, educational institutions must take immediate action which led to unreadiness of teachers and administrators to conduct the remote learning process. Situations above have contributed to an unprecedented move towards the utility of the online learning process, such as blended learning at schools. During the uncertainty, teachers kept on trying to utilise the best tools to provide the students a meaningful and creative educational service. The aim is to let students experience the learning process as well as giving them the knowledge they need to decrease the risk of learning loss.

In English teaching, the effects also occur in teaching pronunciation to the students. Learning English pronunciation can be considered a crucial part of learning a language, especially for English as Foreign Language learners. Because it is essential, Harmer (2007) stated that students should pay close attention to pronunciation as early as possible. Direct feedback to students' pronunciation are usually given in face-to-face teaching and learning. However, during online learning in the Covid-19 pandemic, it is challenging to give feedback to students' pronunciation due to asynchronous instructions and a limited time given in the meeting, not to mention other general problems that can occur such as signal or connectivity problems.

After the new policy issued by the Indonesian government via the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in September (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 10 September 2021), educational institutions are allowed to conduct Limited Face-to-face Learning (Pembelajaran Tatap Muka Terbatas/PTMT) for provinces with Level 3 of Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement (Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat/PPKM). Some schools in Indonesia started to apply Blended Learning to accommodate this situation. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) define blended learning as "the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences." Because this method usage is considered a new approach in teaching English (Hrastinski, 2019), teachers are still trying to utilize it at its best in the virtual classroom, especially while teaching pronunciation to the students.

There are many obstacles in applying blended learning even though the government has reopened schools. Teachers struggle to find the best and the most effective ways to combine online and offline teaching. Despite many obstacles faced by teachers, Mobile Assisted

27

Language Learning (MALL) is used by many teachers during this Covid-19 pandemic. Mobile Assisted Language Learning can be defined as language learning which deals with mobile devices and technology (Sutrisna, Ratminingsih, and Artini, 2018). Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler (2005) supported that MALL can be accessed from smartphones, tablets, and laptops. Many teachers recommend using MALL due to its mobility and ease of access that help teachers have a platform for teaching English. Specifically, it is easy for the students to access the learning materials anywhere and anytime they want in teaching pronunciation.

ELSA Speak App is one of the applications in the MALL category that can be used in teaching pronunciation for students. ELSA Speak App is an application developed by Vu Van of ELSA Corp., which is a rising star startup founded in San Francisco with the engineering office in Lisbon. Their vision is to enable everyone to speak foreign languages with full confidence, which helps to reach a better life and career opportunities (ELSA Corp.). What sets ELSA Speak apart from other English learning apps is the fact that it focuses solely on improving English pronunciation. For this reason, there is an impressive voice scoring feature, a vocabulary database, and a dictionary of video files to help learners understand the spelling and pronunciation of IPA. By integrating blended learning and using ELSA Speak App, teachers can provide more comprehensive pronunciation learning experience.

Oz (2015) states that the successful integration of mobile technology in English learning does not depend on the technology itself. However, it depends to some degree, such as students and teachers' awareness and perception of the technology integrating into English learning. Therefore, it is essential to know the students' perspectives on using ELSA Speaking App in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Thus, this article investigated the students' perspectives on using ELSA Speaking App in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

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METHODS

This study used a quantitative research method to collect data of the student's perspective on using ELSA Speak App in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic in their pronunciation aspect. There are 25 students of Grade IX of SMP Bangun Insan Mandiri selected in purpose and participated in this study. Targeted sampling helps researchers select respondents with specific characteristics to best understand research issues and answer research questions (Creswell, 2014). The 25 students of Grade IX of SMP Bangun Insan Mandiri completed a questionnaire adopted from Martins et al. (2016). The questionnaire is shared through Google Form. The total number of questions in the questionnaire is 25, but there are 5 questions on each side, with the aim of finding a perspective of the students on using ELSA Speak App in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic in their pronunciation ability.

The questionnaire is used to be

effective in relation to the perspective of the students on using ELSA Speak App in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic in their pronunciation ability. As a supplement to the questionnaire, participants are expected to select the most appropriate option from the 4-point Likert scale, including strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The questionnaire consists of five aspects of the

ELSA Speak App: content, pedagogy, assessment/ flexibility, multimedia, and user interface. The data was then quantitatively analysed using scoring interpretation criteria.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings and results of the questionnaire can be observed in the following figures. The explanation of the findings is provided after each figure.
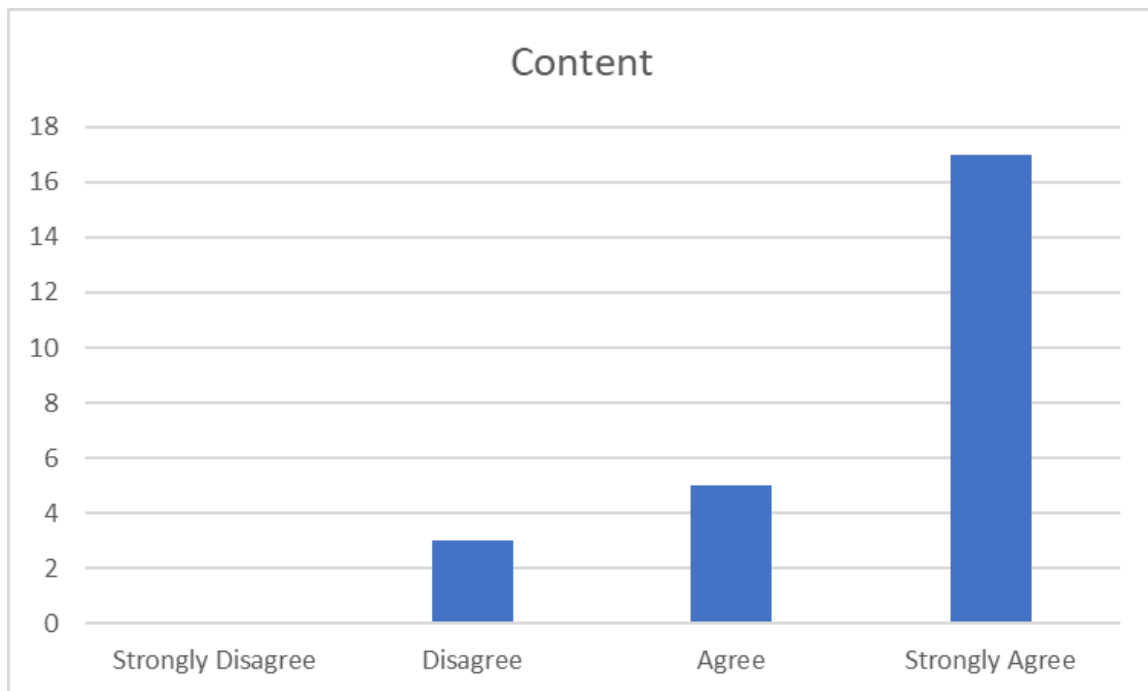

Fig. 1. Students' answers to the questions for ELSA Speak App's content

The figure is the students' answers to ELSA Speak App's content questions. It shows that students' perspectives towards the content provided in ELSA Speak App can be categorized to agree strongly because there are 17 students answers for that category. It can mean that the learning materials provided in the app were complete and fit the students' level of English proficiency. They helped and motivated the students to pronounce the words correctly. From this figure, it is seen that there

are a few students that disagree with the content due to its difficult accent to follow. ELSA Speak App uses a British accent which is quite challenging for students who are not accustomed to it. Therefore, they need more time to adjust to the accent. This situation needs to be checked by the teacher to have more practice pronouncing words with a British accent.
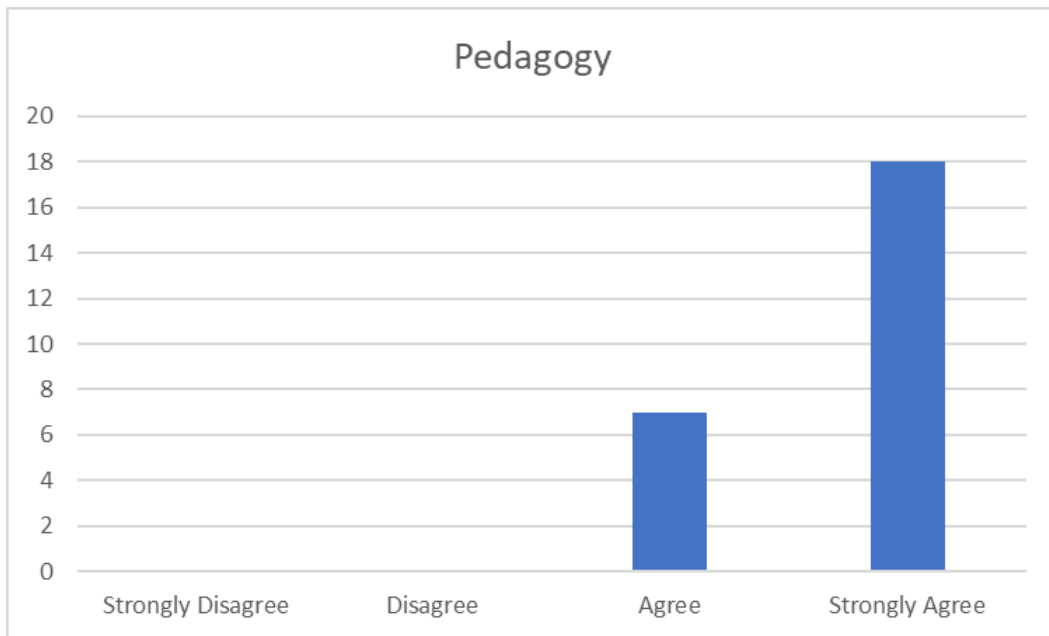
29

Tri Novandhy Silaen, Rahmadsyah Rangkuti│ Elsa Speak App Usage in Blended Learning During The Covid-19 Pandemic: Students' Perspectives

Fig. 2. Students' answers to the questions for ELSA Speak App's pedagogy

This figure informs the students' answers to ELSA Speak App's pedagogical questions. It shows that 18 students strongly agreed to ELSA Speak App's pedagogical approach in the app. This application also uses a game approach in delivering the material to be learned. It creates levels of achievement for every learning material finished in the app. So, every time a specific learning objective is passed, the students will get direct feedback and a token of appreciation. This approach can help the students not feel bored studying pronunciation in blended learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.
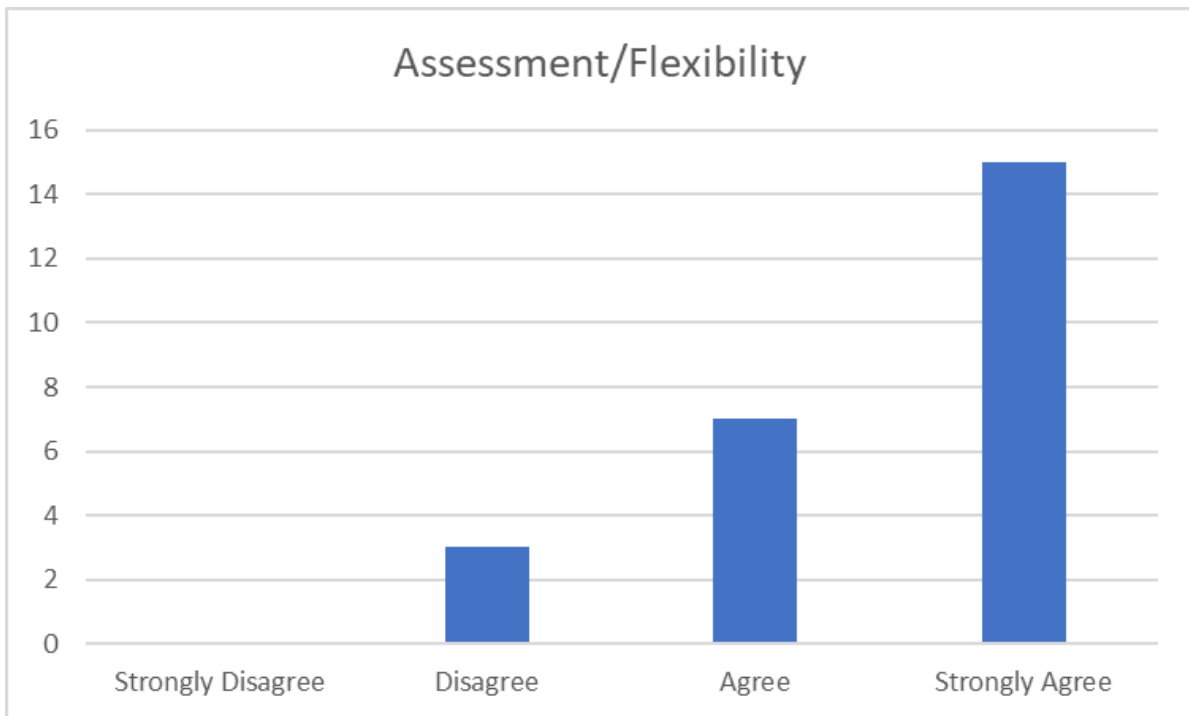
30

Tri Novandhy Silaen, Rahmadsyah Rangkuti | Elsa Speak App Usage in Blended Learning During The Covid-19 Pandemic: Students' Perspectives

Fig. 3. Students' answers to the questions for ELSA Speak App's assessment/flexibility.

The figure shows the students' answers to ELSA Speak App's assessment/flexibility questions. 15 students strongly agreed that the assessment helped them know their English proficiency. For each finished learning objective, the students can get detailed information related to their improvements in pronunciation so that they can keep tracking their development and make plans for their learning pronunciation journey. However, three submissions say that they disagreed with the flexibility of the application. ELSA Speak App consumed a lot of their internet quota to work well. The application kept downloading the learning materials from the server. So, it means that they always have to be connected to the internet to run the application. This disturbs their mobility during the study, especially for those who stay in rural are. The application also drained quite a lot of device battery not to be used in a long time
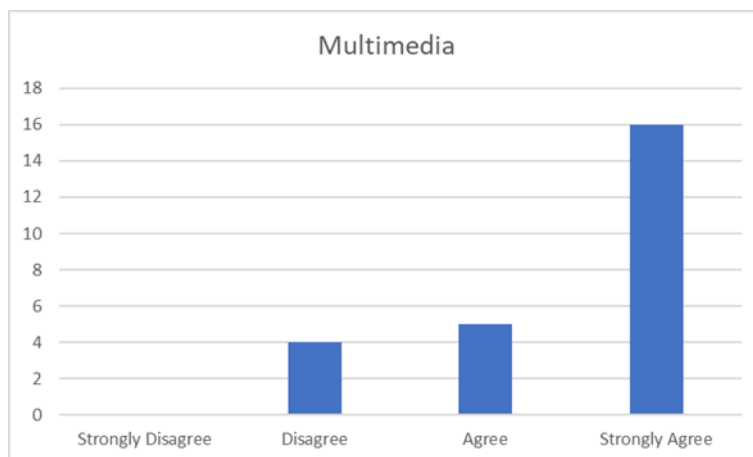

Fig. 4. Students' answers to the questions for ELSA Speak App's multimedia

As provided in Figure 4, 16 students agreed strongly that ELSA Speak App's multimedia are good. Not only does it have a complete library of words for studying pronunciation, but it also has other supporting media such as the IPA transcription of the words, engaging students' placement or profiling test at the beginning of the app registration, and automatic speech recognition. However, four students disagreed with the multimedia provision. After being analyzed, it was because the app needed to load all of the multimedia with the internet quota of the students. So, they need to prepare more quotas in order to access the app.
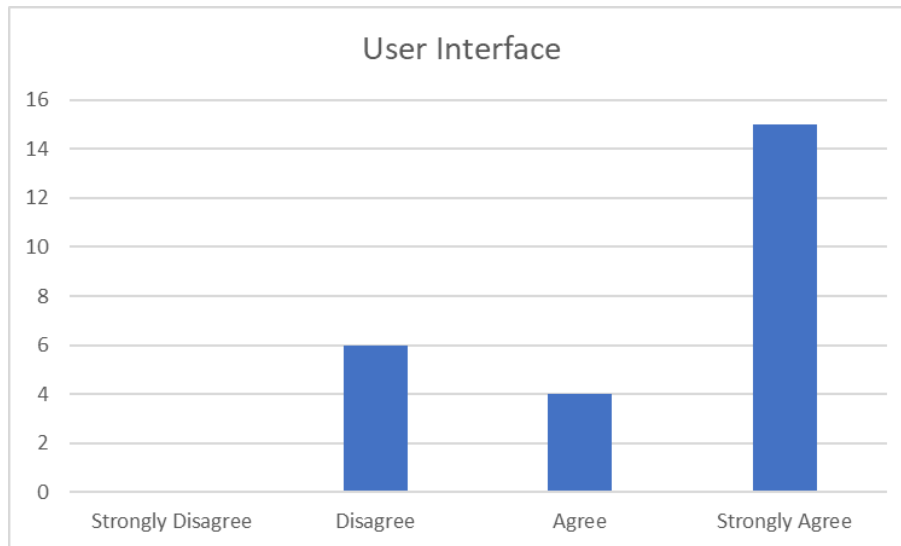

Fig. 5. Students' answers to the questions for ELSA Speak App's user interface

This figure informs the students' answers to ELSA Speak App's user interface questions. Sixteen students agreed strongly that the user interface of the app is good. The user can easily and intuitively move from each app's option. The app's information could also be easily understood because of its high readability. However, six students disagreed with the user interface questions. It was because the user interface of the app was boring. The colors that the developer used were the same in each option. The colors are primarily purple, black, and white. The app also contained advertisements asking to upgrade to a professional account that frequently came during its usage

CONCLUSIONS

The study explored the students' perspectives on using ELSA Speaking App in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Based on the research findings and results, it can be concluded that most of the students agreed that ELSA Speak App was beneficial to help them learn pronunciation in Blended Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The apps' content, pedagogy, assessment/flexibility, multimedia, and user interface are good. It inspires the students to keep practicing their pronunciation. Despite the high quota consumption and monotonous user interface, the student still can get the best learning materials and comprehensive practices

32

to make them sound like a native speaker of English.

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