

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

One of the essential elements in language learning is speaking ability, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). In English as a foreign language Language classroom, teacher play an important role in order to increase the student motivation in speaking English (Shamsuri et al, 2021). Many students in Indonesia, including those at the junior high school level, still struggle with speaking English. According to Richard many EFL students face speaking difficulties due to learning approaches that emphasize more on reading and grammar, resulting in a lack of oral communication skills (Richards, 2008). This is exacerbated in Indonesian schools by limited learning time and conventional learning approaches that do not support the development of speaking ability. Therefore, students' speaking ability are often below the expected standard. According to Brown speaking ability is often a major challenge due to limited practice, low self-confidence, and a less supportive environment for communicating in English (H. D. Brown, 2007).

According to Harmer school curricula often neglect the teaching of speaking ability, focusing instead on reading and writing. This finding reinforces the phenomenon. Students have poor speaking ability, which makes it difficult for them to

participate in conversations, both formal and informal. Speaking ability is an important measure of overall language proficiency, and it is a big problem. This is especially true in the context of international communication (Harmer, 2019).

Speaking ability is becoming increasingly important in the current era of globalization, especially in Indonesia. However, students often face challenges in communicating effectively in English, particularly at the junior high school level. The research by Masekan et al. found that the Elsa Speak app was effective in improving eighth-grade students' speaking skills, with their average scores increasing from 58.26 to 81.47 (Masekan et al., 2024). Similarly, research by Aswaty et al. revealed that Elsa significantly enhanced eleventh-grade students' speaking skills, yielding a t-test value of 10.619 (Aswaty & Indari, 2022). Moreover, research by Nurillah et al., highlighted the importance of technology in English education, as the Elsa Speak app not only improved students' intonation and pronunciation but also boosted their confidence in speaking (Nurillah, A., & Indari, 2021).

AI-based applications like Elsa Speak are among the latest technologies in language learning. This application instantly tracks users' pronunciation, intonation, and sentence structure. Several studies have utilized Elsa Speak. For instance, research by Putri found that the Elsa Speak application had a significant impact on the speaking ability of

eighth-grade students at SMPN 4 Cijaku, Lebak-Banten, during the 2023/2024 academic year (Putri et al., 2024).

Considering the potential of the Elsa Speak application, its integration into English teaching at SMPN 4 Bengkulu is expected to address the challenges of speaking skills. This is evident from the fact that the application not only helps students practice speaking independently but also provides detailed feedback to improve their abilities. According to Saizu the Elsa Speak application has a significant positive impact on improving students' speaking skills in secondary schools. Elsa Speak offers various interactive features that help students enhance their pronunciation through exercises tailored to their proficiency levels. Although challenges exist, such as locked levels and audio response issues, students still demonstrate a high interest in using this application to improve their speaking skills (Saizu et al., 2024).

Elsa Speak has a significant correlation with speaking ability in this context due to its ability to create a supportive, interactive, and practice-focused learning environment. The research by Syabina and Rahman revealed that students had a positive experience using this application to enhance their speaking skills. Most participants stated that the ELSA Speak application made learning more enjoyable. The majority of students found Elsa Speak easy to use and adaptable, with 66.7% agreeing that it facilitated their learning effectively. Additionally, Elsa Speak improved pronunciation, with 96.6%

of participants agreeing that it boosted their confidence in speaking English. Furthermore, 93.4% of participants acknowledged an increase in vocabulary, and 100% agreed that their grammar related to speaking had improved. Moreover, 60% of respondents indicated that they would continue using the application due to its benefits. The study concluded that Elsa Speak helps students enhance their speaking ability and confidence in English (Syabina & Rahman Hz, 2024).

This research aims to determine the effect of the Elsa Speak application in improving students' speaking ability at SMPN 4 Bengkulu. It is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of a more flexible and student-centered approach to English learning. Through the interactive features of Elsa Speak, students can not only enhance their pronunciation but also improve their speaking fluency and confidence in English.

The urgency of this research stems from the pressing need to find effective solutions to the low speaking ability of Indonesian students within the context of formal education. The selection of SMPN 4 Bengkulu as the research site is based on its learning environment, which reflects common challenges faced by schools across Indonesia. Testing conducted at this location is expected to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Elsa Speak application in school.

B. Identification of the Study

Based on the background of the research, the problem identification are:

1. Many students have low confidence and motivation to speak English, making them uninterested in speaking English.
2. Teachers lack the development of varied methods in the learning process, so that learning becomes monotonous and causes students to feel bored in learning.
3. Not optimal in utilizing technology in learning English.

C. Limitation of the Study

The focus on the research, the author limited this research to influence of Elsa Speak Application for increasing speaking ability to class VIII student at SMP Negeri 4 Bengkulu.

D. Research Question

Based on the explanation above, the author formulated the research in this research problem in the research : “Is there any significant of Elsa Speak Application to increase speaking ability at SMPN 4 Bengkulu ?”

E. Objective of the study

The objective of the research that can be specified is to investigate the effect of Elsa Speak Application for increasing speaking ability at SMPN 4 Bengkulu.

F. Significance of the study

This research is going to focus on the use of the Elsa Speak application for increasing speaking ability of class VII students. The study is specifically going to examine the effect of the Elsa Speak application for increasing speaking ability at SMPN 4 Bengkulu.

1. Theoretical benefits
 - a. This research contributes to the academic discourse on the use of technology in education, particularly in English language teaching.
 - b. This research provides insight into how interactive tools such as Elsa Speak can improve speaking ability.
2. Practical benefits
 - a. To deepen understanding of the use of technology, particularly the Elsa Speak App, in English language learning.
 - b. To deepen knowledge on how to combine technology with effective learning approaches.
3. For English teachers
 - a. As a tool to increase student interaction and engagement in learning.
 - b. Teachers can provide more individualized feedback, connect students' progress individually, and make learning more fun and interactive.

4. For students

Students benefit directly from the Elsa Speak app, an engaging and innovative learning tool. The app enables students to practice speaking interactively, receive immediate feedback, and learn independently. It enhances their confidence and improves their English-speaking skills for daily life.

G. The definition of Key Terms

To prevent misunderstanding and incorrect interpretation of this study, some key terms should be defined:

1. Speaking Ability

Speaking is the process of sharing meaning using verbal and non-verbal symbols. According to Richards speaking ability includes the use of linguistic and non-linguistic strategies, understanding of context, grammar, vocabulary, and intonation to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts (Richards, 2008). And then, speaking ability is the ability to produce language and convey meaning through speech when interacting with others directly (Nunan, 1991).

2. Elsa Speak Application

Elsa Speak was founded in 2015 by Vu Van, a Stanford University graduate, along with Dr. Xavier Anguera, an expert in speech recognition and artificial intelligence (Thi et al., 2024). The app listens to users' words, sentences, or conversations to find specific errors and provide accurate feedback and suggestions for improvement in real-time. Furthermore, Elsa Speak is considered an educational innovation in the Society 5.0 era to improve English pronunciation. This app enables interactive learning that can be customized to individual needs. Elsa Speak has been a leader in utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) for personalized pronunciation training. It supports students in improving their English pronunciation through structured exercises and precise feedback (Becker, 2019).