

The Use of Awabe's English Pronunciation Application in Teaching Speaking

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ABSTRACT

The necessity for effective tools to teach speaking skills to students remains essential due to the rapidly evolving landscape of language education. This article aims to assess the effectiveness of Awabe's English pronunciation application in teaching speaking, particularly segmental features pronunciation to the 8th grade students. Pre-experimental design with one group pre-test and post-test is used in this study. In the academic year 2023/2024, the target population consists of 98 eighth-grade students at SMP N 25 Pontianak, with a representative sample of 30 students selected from class 8C through cluster random sampling. Utilizing a pronunciation test as the primary data collection tool, the pre test mean score of 54.47 contrasts with the post-test mean score of 68.60. The statistical analysis, employing a t-test, yielded a significant result of 30.286 with a moderate effect size of 0.969, resulting in the null hypothesis' rejection. These findings underscore the valuable contribution of Awabe's English pronunciation application, particularly emphasizing its impact on pronunciation in the teaching of speaking skills at the junior high school level. As English proficiency continues to be a crucial skill, this study advocates for the integration of this app in speaking skills instruction. Therefore, it was suggested that teachers utilize Awabe's English pronunciation application in teaching speaking, placing specific emphasis on pronunciation.

Keywords: *Awabe's English Pronunciation Application; EFL Speaking Instruction; Segmental Features; Teaching Speaking.*

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of language learning, the significance of pronunciation cannot be overstated. Effective communication in English relies heavily on accurate pronunciation as highlighted by Yudar et al., (2020). They emphasize that pronunciation not only conveys the spoken message but also influences how others comprehend it. This aligns with Berry's (2021) assertion that pronunciation holds a crucial role in oral communication. Therefore, a lack of correct pronunciation can lead to poor verbal communication because, during communication, people express their thoughts and listen attentively. Pronunciation is the foremost aspect to focus on when communicating, and poor pronunciation can result in misunderstandings or communication breakdowns.

Pronunciation is the correct production of a language's sounds, stresses, and intonation patterns and is an essential component of language learning. This is in line with Djurayeva (2021) who states that the production of individual sounds, stresses, and

intonation patterns in the target language is known as pronunciation. According to Ayed (2019), pronunciation is the process of speaking a language, a word, or a sound. As it affects communication and how a speaker is understood, pronunciation is crucial to language learning. Because pronunciation is the first thing a listener notices during a conversation, it is the most important component of effective communication Nurullayevna, (2020). The listener will be able to understand the speaker and their meaning with the help of clear and accurate pronunciation. Poor pronunciation, on the other hand, can lead to misunderstandings, confusion, and even discontent for both the speaker and the listeners. Since many foreign language learners prioritize communication, it is important for learners to be mindful of their pronunciation, focus on producing it correctly, and strive toward improving their overall pronunciation skills Cakir & Baytar, (2014). In addition to facilitating communication, pronunciation is also important for language comprehension. When learners can understand the sounds of a language, they can more easily recognize and remember new words and phrases. Aside from using sound clues, they can also use contextual cues to deduce the meaning of unknown words. Thus, good pronunciation skills are crucial for developing listening and comprehension skills, which are vital components of language learning. Grammar and vocabulary are typically the main topics covered in foreign language classes, which helps students improve their reading and listening comprehension Yürük, (2020).

Pronunciation involves several elements that contribute to effective communication, one of which is segmental features. These features refer to discrete speech sounds, such as vowels and consonants, which are the fundamental phonetic components of a language Sharma, (2021). The correct arrangement of these sounds into syllables also plays an important role in producing clear and intelligible speech. Since pronunciation focuses on how sounds are produced and articulated, it becomes an essential building block of speaking. Speaking, in turn, is the process of using verbal communication to convey thoughts, ideas, and emotions clearly. As Mandasari and Aminatun (2020), explain, speaking involves the articulation of words and sounds to express meaning effectively. Thus, speaking cannot occur without pronunciation, how well sounds are pronounced determines the clarity and fluency of spoken language. If pronunciation is inaccurate, even grammatically correct speech may lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, accurate pronunciation directly supports effective speaking, ensuring that the speaker's message is conveyed smoothly and understood by the listener. Mastering segmental features such as vowels, consonants, and syllables enhances students' ability to speak clearly, which is essential for meaningful verbal interaction. In educational contexts, the ability that students will be evaluated on most in practical circumstances is speaking Rao, (2019). Speaking is an ability that enables people to participate in conversations, share information, and make meaningful connections with others.

Developing speaking skills can be particularly challenging for learners of a second language. Masuram and Sripada (2020), describe speaking as a productive oral communication ability and it entails creating systematic verbal utterances that carry meaning. To communicate the ideas or objectives; the speaker must create words that

are put together in a sentence. Learning to speak is typically challenging because it takes a lot of practice and effort to become highly proficient. According to Kadamovna (2021), effective communication relies on an individual's capacity to talk. Educational exercises that help students improve their communication skills are necessary in the classroom.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of speaking. It is the basis for effective communication in both personal and public situations. Speaking is an essential tool for students in educational settings to ask questions, participate in discussions, and show their mastery of various subjects. Students are given assignments for group discussions and presentations to help them with their speaking skills Kehing & Yunus, (2021). Furthermore, exposure may help students understand the value of speaking abilities and provide them with opportunities to practice speaking Wael et al., (2018). There are several methods that teachers can use to help students improve their speaking abilities. In addition to being educators, instructors also act as motivators, facilitators, and participants. They also give comments as needed. This may facilitate students' acquisition of speaking abilities Wael et al., (2018).

In alignment with the Merdeka curriculum, eighth-grade students in junior high school are instructed in the art of speaking, with a specific focus on participating in presentations involving story retelling. Pronunciation, a critical component, is assessed through the evaluation rubric. Good speaking skills are highly expected of students, but practically there is still a shortage of teaching tools to teach speaking. The writer gathered information regarding students' English-speaking skills based on an in-depth interview with an English teacher at SMP N 25 Pontianak. One challenge students often encounter is the difficulty of pronouncing unfamiliar English words correctly, which frequently results in mispronunciations. In addition, with a lack of teaching tools, teachers find it hard to facilitate language learning activities that can increase students' attention and motivation to learn pronunciation. For this reason, it is necessary to use teaching tools that can provide more exercises for students to pronounce English words. Moreover, it can increase students' attention and motivation when learning to speak English, one of the teaching tools is Awabe's English pronunciation application.

The way people acquire, and practice pronunciation skills has been completely transformed by the use of technology Rogerson-Revell, (2021). Correct pronunciation can now be learned more easily because of technology, which also makes it easier for students to practice. Technology's resources can also boost chances for language output, or production. Examples include controlled pronunciation practice using the sound repetition or organized reactions to meaningful real-world interactions situations, such as when utilizing social media sites or smartphone apps Rogerson-Revell, (2021). Addressing this issue, the study explores the application of Awabe's English Pronunciation app, a technology tool designed to enhance pronunciation skills. According to Yoshida (2018) as part of a technology tool, the purpose of the pronunciation app is to support educators in teaching and learning English pronunciation to students. This app employs the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and various exercises to strengthen vowel, consonant, and word stress proficiency Goodale & Yang, (2019). The Awabe's English Pronunciation application's emphasis

on pronunciation is one of its noteworthy features. The application offers special tools to make learning and mastering pronunciation easier, such as pronunciation audios, interactive practice, and phonetics video guidance. This application's sections each offer multimodal tools for studying pronunciation. Each pronunciation has a picture of rounded lips and a picture of the human mouth with a diagram indicating the tongue's position inside the mouth. In addition, underneath the image are links to audio and video files that describe how to pronounce the target language. After the user has finished studying, the application provides a practice feature that records the user's pronunciation and plays back the recorded samples. Then, users are given the option to rate their pronunciation using a maximum of five stars. Students can record their pronunciation by tapping the recording button. Target pronunciations on the standard American and British received accents are supplied. The Awabe's English pronunciation application provides a variety of exercises to practice pronunciation, strengthen word and phonetic transcription knowledge, and help distinguish similar-sounding words to improve learning. This application is a vital resource for teachers who want to teach their students how to pronounce words correctly in English. The scarcity of teaching tools, as highlighted by an English teacher at SMP N 25 Pontianak, underscores the need for effective resources to improve students' pronunciation skills.

Several recent studies have addressed the issue of utilizing applications for teaching pronunciation. In the work by Paramita et al., (2022), the focus was on evaluating students' speaking ability outcomes through the Cake application. The findings indicated that incorporating the Cake application in English courses effectively enhanced speaking skills, with students successfully using the app for learning without encountering significant issues. Adawiah et al., (2024) explored the impact of the Elsa Speak application on English pronunciation development, revealing its effectiveness in fostering learners' pronunciation skills and facilitating conversations with their interlocutors. Finally, Fouz-González (2020) examined how well the English File Pronunciation (EFP) program worked to improve pronunciation, showing how useful it was for helping EFL students who were having trouble pronouncing certain words.

A similarity between these three studies is the use of technology, specifically mobile learning applications, to teach pronunciation. However, the gap between these previous studies and the current research lies in the specific application utilized and the focus on segmental features in pronunciation. While the previous studies concentrated on general speaking skills or broader pronunciation development, this study specifically evaluates the effectiveness of Awabe's English pronunciation application in teaching speaking especially segmental features such as vowel and consonant sounds. This targeted approach allows for a deeper understanding of how specific pronunciation elements can be improved through technology, addressing a gap in the literature regarding the impact of focused pronunciation tools on learners' performance. The research questions guiding this exploration are; 1. Does the use of Awabe's English Pronunciation application significantly affect students' pronunciation? 2. If so, how effectively does the application influence students' pronunciation?

The study's overarching purpose is to investigate the effectiveness of Awabe's English Pronunciation app in teaching speaking skills to eighth-grade students. Awabe, a Vietnamese company that creates mobile applications for language learners, developed the English Pronunciation app to assist individuals, particularly beginners, in improving their English pronunciation skills Goodale & Yang, (2019). Previous research has highlighted the increasing integration of mobile applications in language learning, with particular attention to their role in enhancing pronunciation and speaking proficiency. For example, studies have shown that apps like Elsa Speak and Cake successfully improve learners' speaking skills by providing interactive practice and immediate feedback. Awabe's app distinguishes itself by focusing specifically on segmental features, such as vowel and consonant sounds, making it a valuable tool for addressing common pronunciation challenges faced by students. This section explores the functions and specific features of the application, highlighting its usefulness as a pronunciation training tool. Additionally, the app employs a variety of multimedia resources, including audio recordings and visual aids, which cater to different learning styles and enhance user engagement. While literature on Awabe's application in particular may be limited, its design and features align with established pedagogical practices in language instruction, suggesting its potential effectiveness in improving students' speaking skills. In conclusion, further exploration of the existing literature on Awabe's applications and similar tools will provide a comprehensive understanding of their impact on language education, particularly in the context of speaking instruction.

The scope encompasses the specific assessment of vowel, consonant sounds, and syllables, aiming to ascertain the app's contribution to accurate pronunciation. The exploration of Awabe's English Pronunciation application carries both theoretical and practical implications for language education. Theoretically, this research contributes to the understanding of technology-enhanced language learning. It sheds light on the effectiveness of a specific pronunciation application, expanding the knowledge base on how such tools impact students' language skills. Researchers and educators may find the results useful in understanding the possibilities of using pronunciation apps into language teaching approaches. On a practical level, the research has direct implications for teachers and students. The identified effectiveness of Awabe's English Pronunciation application suggests a practical solution to the existing shortage of teaching tools for speaking. Educators can leverage this app to enhance their teaching methods, fostering a more engaging and effective learning environment. Additionally, students stand to benefit from improved speaking skills, potentially leading to increased confidence and proficiency in oral communication.

Research variables include Awabe's English Pronunciation application as the independent variable (X) and students' pronunciation as the dependent variable (O_1 & O_2). The hypothesis posits: Null hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant effect of Awabe's English Pronunciation application on students' pronunciation, and alternative hypothesis (H_a): Awabe's English Pronunciation application has a significant effect on students' pronunciation.

METHOD

A pre-experimental design with a one group pre-test and post-test was used in this study to measure the effect of Awabe's English pronunciation application on students' segmental feature pronunciation using a quantitative method. The study was conducted at SMP N 25 Pontianak, with a population of 98 eighth-grade students. The writer utilized cluster random sampling, selecting class 8C with 30 students as the sample. Data collection involved administering pre-tests and post-tests, in which students were required to produce specific segmental sounds such as vowels, consonants, and syllables through a pronunciation test. The validity of the instrument was ensured through feedback from the English teacher and positive responses from students. The reliability of assessments was established through inter-rater reliability, involving independent evaluations by the writer and an English teacher. For data analysis, a scoring rubric for the pronunciation test was used, along with formulas to calculate mean scores, mean difference scores, standard deviation, t-test, and effect size. SPSS version 23 was employed for statistical analysis, including a normality test and hypothesis testing.

Table 1. Scoring rubric for pronunciation test

No	Category	Definition	Score
1	Vowel Accuracy	Near-perfect accuracy in vowel pronunciation.	19-25
		Few minor errors in vowel pronunciation.	13-18
		Noticeable errors but generally understandable.	7-12
		Pronunciation significantly affects understanding.	1-6
2	Consonant Accuracy	Very accurate consonant production.	19-25
		Minor errors in consonant pronunciation.	13-18
		Pronunciation is generally understandable.	7-12
		Pronunciation significantly affects understanding.	1-6
3	Syllable Structure	Accurate and precise syllable formation.	19-25
		Minor deviation in syllable structure.	13-18
		Syllable formation is generally correct.	7-12
		Pronounced issues with syllable structure.	1-6
4	Articulation	Highly precise articulation with minimal to no distortions.	19-25
		Some minor imprecision, but a generally reasonable level of articulation clarity.	13-18
		Demonstrates basic articulation, but noticeable imprecision or distortions.	7-12
		Pronunciation lacks precision, with frequent distortions or unclear articulation.	1-6

The scoring rubric for the pronunciation test was adapted from Park and Mulc (2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study on the use of Awabe's English pronunciation application in teaching speaking among 8th-grade students uncovered significant findings. Notably, there was a substantial improvement in pronunciation accuracy among the students. The study discovered that the pre-test mean score was computed to be 54.47 before the treatment was given. This suggests that on average, students scored in the range of this value. The

individual scores ranged from 40 to 65, with a total sum of 1634 representing all pre-test scores. The post-test mean score was 68.60, indicating an improvement in pronunciation after treatment. The range of scores (60 to 79) and the total sum of 2058 provide a comprehensive overview of the positive progress. In both the pre-test and post-test, students were required to retell the same story, ensuring consistency in the task and assessment criteria. While the students produced the same segmental features such as vowels, consonants, and syllables found in the story, their pronunciation was evaluated for improvements in accuracy and articulation. The story used was "The Camel and the Mousedeer," taken from the LKS Bahasa Inggris for 8th Grade, Talenhta-HOTS-Widjaya (2023). This ensures that students engaged with authentic materials from their textbook. The story contains specific segmental features that students naturally produced during the test. These features include short vowels (/æ/ in *camel*, /ɪ/ in *mousedeer*), long vowels (/ɔ:/ in *tall*, *short*), and plosive consonants (/p/ in *prove*, /b/ in *breakfast*). Retelling the same story during both the pre-test and post-test ensured consistency in task and assessment criteria.

The writer administered the treatment twice in this study. In the first treatment, the writer explained narrative text components and structure since the pronunciation test was in the form of retelling story. This was followed by practical examples like fables and legends. Students then collaborated to create short stories based on the pictures provided by the writer. There were four pictures: the first depicted a boy and his small dog, the second showed a village scene, the third illustrated a mysterious dive into a sunken ship, and the fourth featured a magical tree with golden leaves. The writer provided feedback and introduced pronunciation exercises using Awabe's application for 20-30 minutes for each student to do individual practice. The second treatment focused on honing speaking skills through Awabe's application, covering various phonetic elements emphasizing segmental feature (vowels, consonants, and syllables), and providing direct practice for 35-40 minutes under the writer's guidance.

The mean difference score showed a notable increase of 14.13 from pre-test to post-test, indicating a positive effect on progress due to the treatment. This is how the mean difference score was determined:

$$\begin{aligned}\bar{D} &= \frac{\sum D}{N} \\ \bar{D} &= \frac{424}{30} \\ \bar{D} &= 14,13\end{aligned}$$

The results from the pre-test and post-test showed a standard deviation of 2.556, which suggests a substantial range or fluctuation in the numbers. Additionally, the results of the normality test indicated that the distribution of the data was normal for both the pre-test and post-test. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test, with a significance level of 0.05, is the one that is discussed below. The pre-test normality test had a significance value (Sig.) of 0.158 and the post-test normality test had Sig. of 0.469, as indicated by the table. Furthermore, if the significance value exceeds the significance level, the data

is said to be normally distributed. As a result, the preceding table indicates that the pre-test result was $0.158 > 0.05$ and the post-test result was $0.469 > 0.05$.

Table 2. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
pretest	.135	30	.170	.949	30	.158
posttest	.122	30	.200*	.967	30	.469

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

It is evident from the table below that the t-test value or t is 30.286, its degree of freedom is 29, and the p-value or p is 0.000, with the t-table is 2.045. The results show that the t-test exceeds the value of the t-table ($30.286 > 2.045$). The t-test value of 30.286 exceeded the critical value, indicating a substantial variation in test results between pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 3. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	14.133	2.556	.467	15.088	13.179	30.286	29	.000

The pre-test and post-test data showed a significant and discernible difference, as indicated by the effect size (Cohen's d) of 0.969, which suggested a moderate effect. Following the effect size calculation, as follows:

$$Cohen's d = \frac{\bar{D}}{SD}$$

$$Cohen's d = \frac{14.13}{14.59}$$

$$Cohen's d = 0.969$$

Besides that, as mentioned previously, the hypotheses of this research were: a. The null hypothesis (H0): There is no significant effect of Awabe's English pronunciation application on students' pronunciation. b. The alternative hypothesis (Ha): Awabe's English pronunciation application has a significant effect on students' pronunciation. According to the earlier analysis, the t-test or t-value was computed with 30 samples and a significance level of 0.05, yielding a result of 30.286. The value of the t-table was 2.045 based on the value for $n=30$, the degree of freedom being $n-1$, and the significance threshold being 0.05. The calculation revealed that $30.286 > 2.045$, or the t-value, was more than the t-table. As a result, the hypothesis (Ha) was accepted and the hypothesis (H0) was denied, showing that Awabe's English Pronunciation application had a major impact on students' pronunciation. The theory in this instance met the facts after the t-test was calculated and it was determined that the hypothesis was accepted. The writer subsequently deduced from the computation that teaching speaking to eighth-grade

students at SMP N 25 Pontianak with the use of Awabe's English pronunciation application was effective.

The results indicated that there was a practically significant change in the data between the pre-test and post-tests with regard to the effect of Awabe's application. While not extremely large, it still signified a meaningful and noticeable change in the students' pronunciation abilities due to the application's usage. The practical significance of Awabe's English Pronunciation application is highlighted by its alignment with existing literature on the positive impact of pronunciation applications. This alignment is consistent with Haryadi and Aprianoto (2020) findings, which revealed that integrating an English pronunciation application in teaching speaking led to increased student participation and had a positive effect on establishing a sizeable portion of students engage in independent learning. According to Adityarini et al., (2022) the application of an English pronunciation application can enhance students' pronunciation. These findings further emphasize the efficacy of Awabe's English Pronunciation application in improving students' pronunciation skills.

Furthermore, observations during pre-test, treatment, and post-test phases highlighted common pronunciation errors and weaknesses among students. Students may encounter challenges in pronouncing English words due to regional variations in mother tongue. This aligns with Fadillah (2020) assertion that EFL students' mother tongues are a significant factor in their mispronunciation of English words because pronunciation requires them to position their speech organs in a specific way. In addition to noting students' weaknesses and difficulties, the researcher also noted the advantages of the Awabe's English pronunciation application during observations of students using the application for practice. The application had a positive impact on students' pronunciation as they continuously listened to it during exercises and practiced in a controlled environment. This is consistent with Rogerson (2021) claim that access to technological resources can improve language production chances, including practice with controlled pronunciation through activities like sound repetition or organized answers. The application addressed pronunciation challenges and provided controlled practice, aligning with the literature on technology-enhanced language production.

In conclusion, the comprehensive analysis affirmed the effectiveness of Awabe's English Pronunciation application in teaching speaking, particularly improving eighth-grade students' pronunciation at SMP N 25 Pontianak. The findings strongly support its beneficial impact on pronunciation skills. However, future researchers should address its limitations. Future researchers should compare Awabe with other apps to address recognition failures and explore external factors influencing pronunciation improvement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the effectiveness of the Awabe English Pronunciation application in teaching speaking, with a specific focus on pronunciation, is evident. By analyzing statistical data, the study's goals were met, and it was shown that the students' English speaking abilities improved. The pre-test and post-test showed enhancement, highlighting

how the application helps to facilitate successful learning activities for both educators and learners. This conclusion, supported by statistical calculations, affirms the application's effectiveness in teaching eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 25 Pontianak. The focus remains on answering research objectives, contributing valuable insights to the field of education.

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