



### The Utilization of U-Dictionary to Improve Students' Pronunciation

Nabiela Maulida,<sup>✉</sup> Zulfa Sakhiyya, Dwi Rukmini

Universitas Negeri Semarang

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#### Abstract

The main aim of this research is to assess the effectiveness of U-Dictionary in enhancing the pronunciation skills of students. The ability to pronounce words correctly is a crucial aspect of foreign language acquisition, particularly for Indonesian learners, and it plays a vital role in effective communication. Many English language learners face difficulties in pronouncing words when they speak, read, or listen to English. In today's digital age, mobile applications offer a variety of learning opportunities, including online learning through smartphones. This qualitative study delves into the use of U-Dictionary to augment students' pronunciation skills, and the author provides a detailed account of the research findings. The researchers observed a group of second-grade students at MTs Maarif Andong who were selected for this study. Thirty students participated as respondents and were interviewed and given questionnaires to provide accurate information. The findings indicate that the majority of students found media to be helpful in improving their pronunciation and believed that learning pronunciation is crucial. They also perceived the "perfect English pronunciation feature" in U-Dictionary as a practical and enjoyable way to overcome difficulties in learning pronunciation.

<sup>✉</sup>Correspondence Address (author1):

E-mail (author 1): [nabielamaulida.official@students.unnes.ac.id](mailto:nabielamaulida.official@students.unnes.ac.id)

## INTRODUCTION

Communicating with others could not be avoided by human beings as social creatures. According to Halliday (1994) in SFL that speaking is an activity to exchange meanings it can be from speaker to hearer. Sheirifi (2019) added Speaking skills are important as a part of learning language because we learn speaking skills to communicate and language is about communication because speaking skills show the knowledge of the student and to learn communication they have to express themselves in L2. However, developing the ability to speak in a second or foreign language is widely considered a daunting task for most language learners. If people cannot speak, they have not learned the language, they have to talk to get and deliver a message. Thus, it is essential for students to have fluency in both their mother tongue and English in order to communicate proficiently. Currently, the incorporation of media in the teaching-learning process has a beneficial impact on the overall learning experience.

Dalton and Seidholfer (1994) explain that pronunciation plays a vital role in producing sounds in two significant ways. Firstly, it entails the creation and reception of speech sounds. Secondly, it pertains to the actual act of speaking. Essentially, pronunciation is an essential element of speaking skills that requires the ability to articulate the correct sounds to convey meaning within a particular context. In other words, it is a crucial aspect of effective communication.

Media becomes a good tool in delivering materials in the classroom. U-Dictionary is an application that is used both when the phone is online and offline, and this application was released on March 24th, 2016, offered by Youdao, Hong Kong. In 2023 U-Dictionary has been downloaded by more than 100 million users worldwide. The advantages of using U-Dictionary are free, unique, and simple to get into the application and just download it. For Apple smartphone users it can be downloaded from App Store, and is also available for Android users it can be downloaded from Play Store. U-Dictionary is one mobile application that can be

used as a medium for teaching learning English. In the dictionary, users can access more than 30 languages. This application will represent more fun, and interactive, and users can use it offline. Another interesting feature is that can confirm pronunciation, and speech games to check pronunciation and speaking skills. Those facilities give benefit to the user, especially for English teachers & students who want to improve their pronunciation easily. The researcher use U Dictionary as the media to improve students' pronunciation.

There are some previous studies that related to this research. Researchers have explored various applications that can help improve students' pronunciation. One such application is ELSA, developed by Samad and Ismail (2020) and Muamar (2022), which is designed to enhance pronunciation skills. Additionally, Rahmania and Mandasari (2021) and Astutik et al. (2019) have conducted research using the JOOX music application as a teaching tool. Another study by Everly (2019) found that using Microsoft Office 2016 OneNote in the classroom can also be effective in improving pronunciation. The study mentioned in the previous sentence utilized an application, but the focus of this study is to determine the effectiveness of using U Dictionary as a tool to improve students' pronunciation. Although U Dictionary is primarily a dictionary application, this study aims to highlight its potential for aiding students in their language learning.

## METHOD

For this study, researchers utilized a qualitative approach that involved descriptive analysis. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives of uncovering the truth about how students perceive the observed object activity. The methodology included interviewing students, administering a questionnaire, and documenting actual observations of their activities during class. By using this approach, the researchers aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the students'

perceptions and behaviors in relation to the observed object activity.

### **Source of Data**

The research was centered on a group of 30 learners in their second year of primary education at MTs Maarif Andong.

### **Data Collecting Techniques**

To collect data, a questionnaire and interview were employed in this research, also observation and documentation of the activity of the students. Data collection was collected within 6 days until the 30 students concerned had filled out the questionnaire. A paper-based questionnaire was dispersed with the purpose of gathering comprehensive data regarding the utilization of the U-Dictionary application by students. The obtained results from this questionnaire will be thoroughly analyzed to attain precise and reliable information. As part of this research study, interviews were conducted with students in the field of English research. The interviews were recorded and a questionnaire was administered to evaluate the extent of improvement in the students' pronunciation skills as facilitated by the use of the U-Dictionary application. Furthermore, the questionnaire was also aimed at assessing the benefits that students derived from using the application in their daily teaching and learning activities. During the pronunciation lesson, classroom observations were conducted to align with the students' learning progress using the application. Several activity documents were utilized to track the students' progress while they were learning.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Data was taken from interviews given to 30 students, most of the students are U-Dictionary users. Interviews were conducted in class one by one and recorded through audio. Students are asked to answer questions related to research based on their perceptions. After collecting interview data through audio recordings, the researcher transcribed the results of the interview. After that, the researcher conducted a

questionnaire where there are 8 statements. The researcher analyzes the data to get the results of the student's perception of using U-Dictionary with the feature of learning pronunciation. The purpose of transcribing the result of the interview from audio into dialogue text is to give readers clarity regarding the writer's interview with the students from MTs Maarif Andong. The interview took place on Thursday, 7 August 2023 in the classroom.

There are 30 students in the class and all of them are the participants for the interview. The given time was from 10:00 to 12:00 a.m, and the interview took place for two hours. However, interview time for one person took approximately four to eight minutes; each participant may have a different duration of the interview.

This study finds out the student's perception of the constraints, benefits, and improvement of utilizing U-Dictionary application in learning pronunciation. The explanation of the finding is as follows:

### **1) The Constraints of Using U-Dictionary Application**

This aspect discussed The constraints encountered when using the U-Dictionary application taken from the students' perception. U-Dictionary has many features, and some of them can be used in offline mode but some others are only available in an online mode such as the perfect English pronunciation feature. If the phone is offline, the feature can not be used. Students said that the constraint is the signal, and if the signal is not good then the application has a little problem with responses for getting the clear voice for giving the pronunciation score. In the perfect English pronunciation feature, there is an original sound for the user to hear and follow to pronounce the sentence or words before doing the challenge. In U-Dictionary application has many ads. When the user starts to open the application, it shows up the ads for three seconds, and it cannot skip those ads when using the grammar feature, but if the user wants to back to the first page, the ad will appear, and the user needs to click on the x sign to remove the ad. Ads will also appear at the bottom of the display, and it only exists on the quiz available in U-Dictionary.

2) The Benefits of Using U-Dictionary Application

The second aspect discussed the benefits of using U-Dictionary application. All of the participants agreed that U-Dictionary application is practical and beneficial for the users to overcome difficulties in learning pronunciation. The benefits of using U-Dictionary Application are taken from the students' perceptions. They believed that there are a lot of benefits when using the U-Dictionary, it had the original sound like a native voice helping the user could listen, and how to pronounce the word or sentence. Moreover, it makes the pronunciation better.

Students said that "this app is good and helpful, especially for English learners neither formally nor informally". However, based on their perceptions, all participants are going to use this application in the future. However, one of the participants find it not simple to use this app and also feel distracted because of the ads. Metruk (2017,p.50), stated that "EFL learners have become fairly interested in practicing their pronunciation through modern electronic dictionaries.

3)The Improvement of Utilizing U Dictionary

Dealing with the improvement of the use of U-dictionary has several improvements for the students. Accessing and using the application is simple. Students can access the application on their mobile phones from anywhere. U-Dictionary can be used offline, making it more convenient for the user. Additionally, operating the tool is uncomplicated compared to a traditional dictionary. Another benefit of using language learning applications is that they assist students in learning how to pronounce words or phrases quickly and effortlessly. No longer do they have to flip through a dictionary to figure out how to say something correctly. Additionally, the quick search capabilities of these apps make it easier for students to comprehend the meaning of the words or phrases they are translating. Furthermore, the application can enhance the students' English pronunciation indirectly. Even though they only read and write the words or sentences they have translated, they still learn new words in the process.

The students were given options to choose from regarding how to use U Dictionary to improve their pronunciation. The researcher analyzed the questionnaire results using percentages, as follows:

$$\text{The result} = \frac{\text{Sum of the students' responses of one question}}{\text{The number of students}} \times 100\%$$

**Table 1.** The table of the students' responses results of the questionnaire

Questions	Yes%	No%
Saya tertarik belajar bahasa Inggris	30	70
Saya bisa melafalkan bahasa Inggris	40	60
Saya mengetahui U Dictionary sebelumnya	20	80
U Dictionary membantu saya memahami dalam melafalkan bahasa Inggris dengan mudah	70	30
U Dictionary aplikasi yang sangat menyenangkan	70	30

The researcher will present the results using the data table collected from the questionnaire mentioned earlier..

- 1) The first question was "Saya merasa tertarik belajar bahasa inggris". The percentage were 30% answerd Yes and 70% answerd No. Based on the information available, it appears that the majority of students did not prioritize learning English.
- 2) The second question was "Saya bisa melafalkan bahasa Inggris". The percentage was 40% answered Yes and 60% answered No. Learning how to pronounce English correctly can be difficult for students because it requires reproducing the language's sounds and intonations accurately. This can be a challenging task due to its complexities.
- 3) The third question was "Saya mengetahui U Dictionary". The percentage was 20% answered Yes and 80% answered No This indicates that students seldom search for English apps, such as U Dictionary.
- 4) The forth question was "U Dictionary membantu saya memahami dalam melafalkan bahasa Inggris dengan mudah". The percentage

was 70% answered Yes and 30% answered No. Most students became enthusiastic about studying pronunciation when they used U Dictionary after the teacher explained and practiced it during the learning process.,

5) The fifth question was “U Dictionary aplikasi yang sangat menyenangkan”. The percentage was 70% answered Yes and 30% answered No It is evident that U Dictionary is a highly effective and enjoyable tool for mastering English pronunciation, as evidenced by the positive feedback received from numerous students. After analyzing a survey, it was discovered that many students have expressed a strong interest in using U Dictionary to improve their English pronunciation. This tool has been shown to be highly effective in helping students articulate English words and sentences more easily, as reported by survey participants.

## CONCLUSION

After conducting research on the utilization of U-Dictionary for improving pronunciation skills among second-grade students at MTs Maarif, the researchers have arrived at certain conclusions.

The U-Dictionary app offers more than just a dictionary. Its numerous features are particularly helpful for those learning English. The students at MTs Maarif have found the "perfect English pronunciation feature" to be especially useful in addressing pronunciation challenges in an enjoyable manner. For those studying at MTs Maarif, U-Dictionary proves to be a valuable resource for improving English pronunciation. This tool is not only easily accessible but also free to download. While some students have encountered signal problems, which can affect the clarity of the pronunciation score, U-Dictionary remains a top choice for English language learners. This is due to its ability to provide accurate word sounds, more comprehensive meanings, and improved grammar. Overall, U-Dictionary is a highly beneficial tool that can help students enhance their English language skills. Learning how to pronounce

words correctly can be a challenge for English language learners. Fortunately, with the help of applications, students can improve their pronunciation skills by practicing saying sentences correctly, even if they are unfamiliar with the sentence structure. U-Dictionary is an excellent example of a modern electronic dictionary application designed with English language learners in mind. Its features are specifically tailored to support learners, making the learning experience more enjoyable and effective. By using U-Dictionary, users can have fun while they learn and improve their English language skills effortlessly.

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