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U-Dictionary Improves Pronunciation in Narrative Story Learning

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Abstract

General Background: English pronunciation is a fundamental component of oral communication competence, yet it remains one of the most challenging aspects for EFL learners, particularly in contexts where English phonology differs significantly from the native language. **Specific Background:** The integration of mobile-assisted language learning tools, such as the U-Dictionary application, offers audio models, phonetic transcription, and translation features that may support pronunciation practice during narrative story activities. **Knowledge Gap:** Previous research has largely emphasized vocabulary development or alternative media, leaving limited empirical evidence on the use of U-Dictionary for pronunciation within narrative text learning. **Aims:** This study examined whether the use of the U-Dictionary application significantly improves students' English pronunciation when learning narrative stories. **Results:** Using a quantitative one-group pretest-posttest design with 24 ninth-grade students, the mean score increased from 50.00 to 58.13, and a paired sample t-test yielded a significance value of 0.047 (< 0.05), indicating a statistically significant difference after the intervention. **Novelty:** The study provides focused evidence on mobile dictionary-assisted pronunciation practice embedded in narrative story learning, particularly addressing difficulties with regular and irregular verb pronunciation. **Implications:** The findings suggest that accessible mobile applications can serve as practical alternative media for technology-integrated language instruction and support independent pronunciation practice in secondary school contexts.

Highlights:

- Learners' post-intervention scores increased compared with baseline performance.
- Statistical testing confirmed a meaningful difference after the treatment phase.
- Audio models with phonetic guidance enabled independent practice during reading tasks.

Keywords:

U-Dictionary; English Pronunciation; Narrative Story; Mobile-Assisted language Learning; EFL Students

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Introduction

In this era, the use of English is increasingly widespread among the public. Mastery of English is mandatory for Indonesia's young generation, given its status as an international language. However, to master English is not an easy thing because not everyone can learn it and not everyone likes to learn new languages, especially in Indonesia [1]. To master English, proper and fluent pronunciation is required to avoid misunderstanding the meaning of the English sounds produced. With the development of increasingly sophisticated technology, technology integration in education is a more effective approach. The use of application such as U-Dictionary can increase the attractiveness of learning English. It has the potential to attract students to learn English more actively. In addition, learning through narrative story can be a tool to improve students' pronunciation skills. Thus, the combination of technology and conventional learning methods is expected to improve English learning outcomes among students.

Pronunciation refers to how words are articulated in English. Pronunciation is a key component in achieving spoken proficiency in any language [2]. Good English pronunciation skills can also make students more confident in using English [3]. In other words, proper pronunciation is essential to achieving success in mastering the English language. The elements of a good verbal utterance are an appropriate accent, stress, intonation, and rhythm [4]. However, learning pronunciation is not easy. Pronunciation is the most difficult thing for students in learning English [5]. Students often have difficulties when pronouncing English words correctly in English learning.

The difficulties students face in English pronunciation are often caused by the difference between the sounds of English pronunciation and the sounds in their native language. Students have many problems distinguishing between the sounds of English and the sounds of their native language [6]. The limited ability to recognize and produce certain sounds in English can hinder the learning process. The pronunciation sounds in English are clearly different from the sounds of the native language. In addition, many words in English have similar sounds, which adds complexity for students. The inability to distinguish these sounds can result in a change in the meaning of the word which will interfere with students' understanding of the wider context. Students who are not yet proficient in English Pronunciation tend to pronounce words based on how they are written. This causes the resulting sound to be different from the original pronunciation. Many students experience problems in pronunciation, where they pronounced words according to the way they are written and have difficulty distinguishing how to promote one word from another [7]. Lack of word mastery in English has the potential to negatively impact students' pronunciation outcomes. Therefore, an innovative approach in teaching pronunciation is needed so that students can learn in an easier and more accurate way.

Based on pre-observation conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Tanggulangin Sidoarjo, it was found that students have difficulty in English pronunciation. These results were obtained based on interviews from teachers. Learning media used in English learning has also not been widely used. In fact, a fast and effective way to improve students' pronunciation skills is needed. Integrating technology into English learning can be an effective approach, one of the which is through the utilization of U-Dictionary application as a student learning media.

The use of digital-based applications is becoming popular in language learning. Technology is needed as a practical learning medium or tool. Digital technology facilitates the process of learning English while encouraging active student participation and improving the overall quality of education [8]. Digital technology has great potential to revolutionize education and empower learners around the world [9]. To improve the teaching and learning environment, teachers should contribute by incorporating technology into learning [10]. This research utilizes the theory of Technology Enhanced Language Learning and Teaching (TELL), where technology can be integrated into language learning [11]. One of the appropriate applications to learn English pronunciation is U-Dictionary.

U-Dictionary is a free and accurate dictionary and translation application officially released by Oxford that provides many languages. U-Dictionary can be accessed online and offline. This application provides various features such as voice features, magic translation, camera translation, quiz game, English learning videos and others. In this application, there are some features that are still paid such as magic translation, camera translation, and some learning videos. U-Dictionary can also check your pronunciation with native transcripts and accents from the UK (British) and US (American) [12]. U-Dictionary provides audio representations of words, word stress and intonation, and language translation features to help learners practice pronunciation [13].

Language pronunciation and narrative story are closely related. A narrative story is a story that contains imaginative or fictional story with the aim of entertaining the reader. A narrative is a type of text that tells about a series of events, either real or imagined [14]. Students will find many familiar or unfamiliar English words in narrative stories. Through narrative stories, students can recognize and practice pronouncing familiar and unfamiliar words. So that students can recognize many sounds of English words. In addition, the ability to read the text makes them understand what is in the text [15].

In narrative learning, it is common to use the past tense. The use of past tense usually involves regular verbs and irregular verbs. Regular verbs are often found because they generally end in -ed. Words with the -ed ending are more difficult to pronounce because they sometimes have a different sound to their written form and the sound tends to have an emphasis at the end. The pronunciation of the -ed ending is often a challenge for students. In the pronunciation of the -ed ending, there are three different pronunciation patterns, namely /d/, /t/, and /ɪd/. The pronunciation of the three patterns is certainly different. For example, the word *called* is pronounced as /kɔld/, *lived* is pronounced as /lɪvd/, and *replied* is pronounced as /rɪ'plaid/. Students often experience errors in the pronunciation of the -ed suffix in learning English and tend to pronounce it according to the written form of the word without knowing the original sound.

Irregular verbs are a category of verbs that do not add the -ed ending in past tenses. Instead, irregular verbs are often written and sounded differently from their present form. For example, the word *could* is pronounced as /kʊd/ from the first tense *can*, *ran* is pronounced as /ræn/ from the first tense *run*, and *went* is pronounced as /went/ from the first tense *go*. These three words are examples of words that are still often mispronounced by students. The mismatch between written form and pronunciation can cause student confusion.

The features of U-Dictionary are proved to boost students' interest and participation in the vocabulary learning process [16]. The use of U-Dictionary provided better results than using printed dictionaries to improve students' vocabulary [17]. In the previous study, the researchers focused on improving students' pronunciation through movies or music [18]. There are other studies that focus on pronunciation, but used different media such as rosetta stone [19]. Thus, few research have been conducted that explain the efficiency of U-Dictionary to enhance students' pronunciation in narrative story learning. To fill the gap in previous studies, the researchers applied the use of U-Dictionary to support students' pronunciation skills with narrative story material in English language learning.

Research Question

1. Is there a significant effect of using U-Dictionary towards students' pronunciation?

Method

A. Research Design

This research applied a quantitative method with a one-group pre-experimental design to evaluate how effective the U-Dictionary application in enhancing students' English pronunciation skills within the context of narrative story. The researchers selected this design due to its focus on a single group of students who exhibited low average scores in English pronunciation. The choice of a one-group pretest-posttest design was primarily influenced by unavoidable practical constraints, including limited classroom accessibility, restricted time allocation, and school policies permitting experimentation only within one available class.

Although this design presents inherent limitations concerning internal validity, it remains a valuable method for providing preliminary, relevant, and informative insights into the application's effectiveness in small-scale classroom settings and can be used as a basis for developing more effective learning methods in the future. Focusing on a single group enabled the researcher to observe the impact of the intervention more intensively while facilitating efficient data collection and analysis.

At the time of treatment, students first took a pre-test without learning media. In this study, respondents were given permission by the school to use mobile phones during the learning process, so that respondents could access U-Dictionary using a cellphone. After that, the treatment was given by applying U-Dictionary. Then the post-test was given as the final stage test to determine the significant effect of applying U-Dictionary after the treatment. The following was a one-group pre-test and post-test design table taken from Maghfiroh et al. [20].

Class	Pre-Test	Treatment	Post-Test
A	01	X	02

Table 1.

Information:

A: treatment class

01: describe the pre-test

X: research treatment

02: describe the post-test

B. Population

The participants of this study consisted of junior high school students in SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Tanggulangin. The study's population consisted of ninth-grade students. However, for the purposes of this study, the sample used was a small group of 9th-grade students consisting of 24 students. The selection of this group was based on considerations of students' academic ability and teacher recommendation. Through the pre-experiment design, researchers focused on one group only. The group was given a pretest as the initial stage to measure students' abilities. After that, students received treatment in the form of understanding the U-Dictionary application as an English pronunciation learning tool, with narrative text as the material. As the last step, students were given a posttest to assess students' abilities after treatment. As part of the concluding session, a post-test was carried out to determine the effect of U-Dictionary application on students' pronunciation skills.

C. Instrument

The researchers conducted tests to acquire data. The test aimed to determine students' pronunciation skills before and after being given treatment. The two types of tests used by researchers are pre-test and post-test. Before the treatment began, an

initial test was conducted to measure the students' basic pronunciation abilities. After the pre-test, students were given treatment by applying learning media. Post-test was given after the students received the treatment. Students were tested one by one to find out the results of their abilities after getting treatment in the last stage.

D. Pre-Test

Pre-test was the initial step that was taken to measure students' pronunciation skills. This test was conducted before students get treatment. The steps were as follows:

1. Procedure:

a) The teacher provided a narrative story (fables). The story is taken from Aesop [21].

The Dog, the Cock, & the Fox
<p>A Dog and a Cock, who were the best of friends, wished very much to see something of the world. <u>So</u> they decided to leave the farmyard and to set out into the world along the road that <u>lead</u> to the woods. The two comrades traveled along in the very best of spirits and without meeting any adventure to speak of.</p> <p>At nightfall the Cock, looking for a place to roost, as was his custom, spied nearby a hollow tree that he thought would do very nicely for a night's lodging. The Dog could creep inside and the Cock would fly up on one of the branches. So said, so done, and both slept very comfortably.</p> <p>With the first glimmer of dawn the Cock awoke. For the moment he forgot just where he was. He thought he was still in the farmyard where it had been his duty to arouse the household at daybreak. <u>So</u> standing on tip-toes he flapped his wings and crowed lustily. But instead of awakening the farmer, he awakened a Fox not far off in the wood. The Fox immediately had rosy visions of a very delicious breakfast. Hurrying to the tree where the Cock was roosting, he said very politely:</p> <p>“A hearty welcome to our woods, honored sir. I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you here. I am quite sure we shall become the closest of friends.”</p> <p>“I feel highly flattered, kind sir,” replied the Cock slyly. “If you will please go around to the door of my house at the foot of the tree, my porter will let you in.”</p> <p>The hungry but unsuspecting Fox, went around the tree as he was told, and in a twinkling the Dog had seized him.</p>

Figure 1. The narrative story

b) The teacher gave time for students to practice reading the texts independently.

c) Students read the narrative story in the form of fables in front of the teacher in return.

2. Test Instructions

This test guide contained practice questions for students. It aimed to improve students' cognitive and understanding of the previous material [20]. a) Read the narrative story independently and carefully for 10 minutes. b) Read the narrative story in front of the teacher in turn.

E. Treatment

U-Dictionary application was applied in learning narrative story as a form of treatment in this study. Students were able to use U-Dictionary to find out how to pronounce difficult words in narrative text. The use of this application was very simple. Users only needed to type the word they want to pronounce, and the results were displayed immediately. There was a voice feature that allowed users to listen to the pronunciation of native speakers.



Figure 2.

The stages of use were as follows:

1. Initial Part

- a) Provided an explanation of the narrative story.
- b) Introduced students to the U-Dictionary app, including its features and how to use it.
- c) Provided instructions to students to download and install the U-Dictionary app.

2. Main Part

- a) Students read the narrative story provided by the teacher individually. The story was taken from Aesop [22].

Figure 3.

- b) Students identified words whose pronunciation they do not know, such as difficult words, regular verbs, and irregular verbs and used U-Dictionary app to listen and imitate the correct pronunciation of the words.

c) Students paired up to practice pronouncing all words in the text and provided each other with feedback.

1. Final Part

a) The teacher conducted a discussion session with the students about all words in the text.

b) The teacher organized a presentation session for students to pronounce the narrative story they had read previously.

c) The teacher provides feedback to students on their pronunciation learning using the application.

Regular/Irregular Verbs	Transcription	Meaning
called	/kɔːld/	memanggil
carried	/'kærɪd/	dibawa
ended	/endɪd/	berakhir
leaped	/lipt/	melompat
lifted	/lɪftɪd/	mengangkat
recognized	/'rekəɡnaɪzd/	mengenali
shivered	/'ʃɪvəd/	menggigil
started	/s'tɑːtɪd/	mulai
came	/keɪm/	datang
kept	/kept/	terus
knew	/nuː/	tahu
made	/meɪd/	membuat
ran	/ræn/	berlari
said	/sed/	berkata
thought	/θɔːt/	memikirkan

Table 2. Treatment Instrument.

F. Post-Test

For this last stage of the test, the Post-test. In this case, the Post-test is used to measure students' pronunciation skills after treatment.

1. Procedure

a) The teacher provided a narrative story (folktales). The story was taken from Ohoiwutun [23].

Figure 4. The narrative story

b) The teacher gave time for students to practice reading the texts independently.

c) Students read the narrative story in the form of folktales in turn.

2. Test Instructions

a) Read the narrative story independently for 15 minutes.

b) Read the narrative story with correct pronunciation in front of the teacher in turn.

G. Scoring Criteria

The assessment for pronunciation was adapted from Brown [24].

Score	Explanation
1	Although pronunciation issues are common, they are usually tolerated.
2	Accents are comprehensible despite frequent mistakes.
3	Mistakes do not interfere with comprehension. The accent may be clearly foreign.
4	Error related to pronunciation happen frequently.
5	Equal and fully recognized by highly educated native speakers.

Table 3. Pronunciation Scoring Criteria

H. Data Analysis

This research employed statistical analysis after collecting the final results from students' pronunciation assessments. The data, which were quantitatively measured through structured tests, served as the basis for evaluating students' performance. To ensure the validity of subsequent statistical procedures, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was initially carried out to examine whether the data followed a normal distribution. Upon confirmation that the assumption of normality was fulfilled, the researcher proceeded with a paired sample t-test, conducted using SPSS version 22. The focus of this analysis was to assess the effectiveness of the U-Dictionary application as a medium to improve students' pronunciation skills significantly, based on the comparison of their scores before and after the intervention.

Result And Discussion

A. Results

The assessment rubric used in this study was adapted from Krismonika et al. [21]. There are two types of evaluation: the first focused on correctly pronounced words as detected by the U-Dictionary application, and the second assesses accurately pronounced sentences from a narrative story. The converted score was calculated by combining the total number of correctly pronounced words and sentences, then multiplying the result by 5 to obtain a maximum score of 100.

No.	Students' Code	Pre-Test				Post-Test			
		Pronunciation				Pronunciation			
		A	B	C	D	A1	B1	C1	D1
1.	S-1	10	3	13	65	13	3	16	80
2.	S-2	4	2	6	30	10	2	12	60
3.	S-3	7	2	9	45	11	4	15	75
...
...
24.	S-24	13	2	15	75	13	3	16	80
Total Score					1.200				1.395
Mean					50.00				58.13

Figure 5. Data of Students' Pronunciation Score Pre-test and Post-test

Note:

(Pretest)(Posttest)

A = correct word from U-Dictionary A1 = correct word from U-Dictionary

B = correct sentence/paragraph from the narrative story B1 = correct sentence/paragraph from the narrative story

C = total score C1 = total score

D = converted score D1 = converted score

The data results mentioned above show the students' pre-test and post-test scores generated before and after using the U-Dictionary application. In the pre-test, the highest score achieved was 75 and the lowest was 20, with the majority of students scoring below the Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal (KKM), which is 75. Only 6 students managed to reach the highest score, indicating that the students' initial pronunciation ability in English, particularly in the context of narrative stories, was still relatively low and unevenly distributed.

After the treatment, the post-test results showed a general improvement in students' pronunciation skills. The highest score increased to 80 and the lowest to 25. More students succeeded in scoring above the KKM, although some were still below.

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Overall, these findings suggest that the use of the U-Dictionary application had a positive impact on enhancing students' English pronunciation performance.