



Vietnamese EFL Students' Perspectives On Application Of Artificial Intelligence Technology Tool Reading Progress In Learning English Pronunciation

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is taking over many areas of human life, including teaching English pronunciation. Reading Progress is an AI-powered tool in Microsoft Teams developed by Microsoft to assist language learners in practicing pronunciation. However, there is a limited amount of research available on this application. This study aims to investigate students' evaluations of the use of the tool in learning English pronunciation. This research uses an online survey with 123 English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) students studying pronunciation in various English courses at a university in northern Vietnam. The research findings indicate that learners positively evaluate and consider Reading Progress as a useful tool for practicing pronunciation. This result contributes to providing more research information on the application of Reading Progress in the context of teaching English pronunciation in Vietnam as well as around the world. Therefore, learners and English teachers can refer to and apply it in practice, increasing the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, Reading Progress, AI-powered technology tools, English pronunciation

1. Introduction

Studies stress the important role of pronunciation in foreign language learning (Bakar & Abdullah, 2015; Lieber, 2024; Nafisa, 2022; Turner, 2024). From various perspectives, researchers emphasize that accurate pronunciation enhances communication effectiveness (Nafisa, 2022; Turner, 2024) and promotes positive perceptions from listeners (Bakar & Abdullah, 2015). Even learners themselves acknowledge the importance of pronunciation to achieve fluency and confidence (Bakar & Abdullah, 2015). Therefore, pronunciation seems to be an important factor in developing successful English skills.

Research also shows that AI technology will improve English learning (Anand, 2021; Narasimhan, 2023). AI-enabled tools can personalize the learning experience (An et al., 2023) and provide opportunities for regular practice, enhancing language learning skills (Moulieswaran & Prasantha Kumar, 2023). AI technology offers significant potential to enhance English pronunciation learning (Benzies, 2017; Li, 2022). Automatic speech recognition (ASR) enables real-time feedback on pronunciation errors, providing opportunities for error correction practice (Bashori et al., 2022; McCrocklin, 2019). AI-powered applications can be applied pronunciation training, making it more engaging for learners (Chuyen et al., 2021). Integrating AI speech recognition and machine learning into teaching systems can personalize pronunciation training and track progress (Jiao et al., 2021). With these advantages, the wider application of AI technology in learning English pronunciation promises to help learners progress in their studies.

Reading Progress in Microsoft Teams was launched in 2021 as a tool developed by Microsoft designed to assist educators in fostering learners' aspects of pronunciation (Burns, 2021; Valenza, 2021). It quickly attracted attention for its potential to enhance the pronunciation learning experience through technology (Maggin & Irani-Tehrani, 2023). Microsoft has made it a core component in Teams (Microsoft, n.d.-a). Research shows that Reading Progress is highly relevant to different types of learners, with studies exploring its impact on learners in Saudi Arabia (Alahmadi, 2024) and Thailand (Hongnaphadol & Attanak, 2022; Sirichote & Kanokpermpoon, 2023).

One of the most appealing aspects of Reading Progress lies in its AI-powered features, which directly contribute to improving English pronunciation. The core functionality allows students to record their reading of assigned passages (Microsoft, n.d.-b). Educators can then review these recordings and provide targeted feedback on pronunciation errors (Prasetya, 2022). This personalized approach is consistent with the growing interest in AI-driven educational tools (Hasan, 2024). Reading Progress also features automatic voice recognition (ASR) that contributes to effective pronunciation practice is. This technology allows for real-time analysis of student recordings, potentially highlighting mispronunciations, speed, accuracy rates, and omissions (Molenda & Grabarczyk, 2022). This allows for immediate corrective feedback, an important factor in developing pronunciation.

While the Reading Progress app has great potential for developing pronunciation, research by Taylor et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of considering stakeholder perceptions. Understanding faculty and student perspectives on the usability and effectiveness of this tool is critical to its successful implementation.

Recognizing the importance of pronunciation in learning English, the role of AI applications in English teaching and learning, and the potential support of Reading Progress in improving English pronunciation, this study presents initial research results on the evaluation opinions of students studying pronunciation in some English courses with Reading Progress application at Hoa Lu University in two consecutive semesters of the 2021-2022 school year and the 2022-2023 school year. The research results are expected to explore the students' perspectives on the application on the use of Reading Progress in learning pronunciation, and at the same time enrich research on the application of artificial intelligence in English teaching.

2. Previous Studies on the Application of Reading Progress

Reading Progress has attracted significant research attention for its potential to improve reading fluency and pronunciation in English language learners (EFL) (Alahmadi, 2024; Hongnaphadol & Attanak, 2022; Prasetya, 2022; Sirichote & Kanokpermpoon, 2023). Several studies demonstrate the positive impact of Reading Progress on pronunciation. Research by Hongnaphadol and Attanak (2022) shows that this tool can reduce pronunciation anxiety among learners of English as a foreign language in Thailand. The ability to practice reading in a safe, controlled environment provided by Reading Progress helps students overcome their fears and speak more confidently. Similarly, Prasetya (2022) found Reading Progress to be effective in improving listening and speaking abilities, suggesting its potential in enhancing overall pronunciation skills.

The tool's AI features are central to its effectiveness. Automatic speech recognition (ASR) enables real-time identification of pronunciation errors, allowing educators to provide immediate corrective feedback (Molenda & Grabarczyk, 2022). This personalized approach is consistent with established methods for effective pronunciation learning. Furthermore, Reading Progress offers customization options, allowing educators to adjust the sensitivity of pronunciation detection to cater to diverse learning styles and proficiency levels (Microsoft, n.d.- a).

While some studies paint a promising picture, there is also research that highlights areas that need further exploration. Jarrah (2024) investigated the use of the Reading Progress app by English teachers in Saudi Arabia, identifying potential obstacles to its implementation. These problems include a lack of adequate training for educators and technical difficulties within the platform. Addressing these concerns is critical to ensuring successful integration of this tool into classroom practice.

Stakeholder awareness is also important. Taylor et al. (2023) examined the perspectives of educators, students, and administrators on the adoption of the Reading Progress application in a bilingual program in Thailand. The study highlights the need to understand these diverse perspectives to maximize user adoption and optimize tool effectiveness.

Thus, the results of the studies show that the Reading Progress application provides valuable technologies to improve pronunciation practice for English learners. Its AI features, especially ASR and customization options, promise personalized learning and improved pronunciation accuracy. However, more research is needed to explore the long-term impact of the Reading Progress app on student academic performance. Additionally, addressing potential implementation challenges and understanding stakeholder perspectives will be important to maximize the impact of this tool in English language teaching contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research context and participants

This study was conducted in Hoa Lu University located in Ninh Bình province in northern Vietnam. From the 2019 - 2020 school year, the university began to deploy the use of Microsoft Teams free package for qualified higher education institutions. Lecturers and students in the school were given accounts and instructions to log in and use them to serve their learning needs for subjects in both online and offline modes.

At Hoa Lu University, English is a mandatory subject for all students in the university's majors. In the first two years, students take three basic English courses: English 1, English 2, and English 3. After that, students must take English for specific purposes (ESP) courses. For students majoring in economics, the ESP courses are Basic business English 1, 2, and 3. For students majoring in tourism, the ESP course is English for the Hotel -

Restaurant industry. The teaching and learning schedule for all courses is allocated within 15 weeks. The textbook used for the three English modules 1, 2, and 3 is the SmartChoice series by Oxford publisher. For basic business English modules 1, 2, and 3, the textbooks are the New Market Leaders series from Longman Pearson publisher.

Reading Progress application is carried out in 5 different English classes in 2 consecutive phases with a total number of participating students of 123. Phase 1 is in the 2nd semester of the 2021-2022 school year with 2 classes: (1) - Class D12 Business Administration, basic business English 3; and (2) - Class D14, class number 2, English 2. Phase 2 is in the first semester of the 2022-2023 school year with 3 classes: (1) - Class D13 Business Administration, basic business English 3; (2) - Class D14 Tourism, English for the Hotel - Restaurant industry; and (3) - Class D14 class 6, English 3. (See Table 1 below)

Table 1 Application of Reading Progress in classes

| School year | Classes | Students | Courses | Textbooks |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 2021 - 2022 | D12 Business Administration | 9 | Basic business English 3 | New Market Leader (Intermediate) |
| | D14 Class 2 | 54 | English 2 | SmartChoice 2 |
| 2022 - 2023 | D13 Business Administration | 13 | Basic business English 3 | New Market Leader (Intermediate) |
| | D14 Tourism | 11 | English for the Hotel - Restaurant industry | Be my guests |
| | D14 Class 6 | 36 | English 3 | SmartChoice 3 |
| Total | | 123 | | |

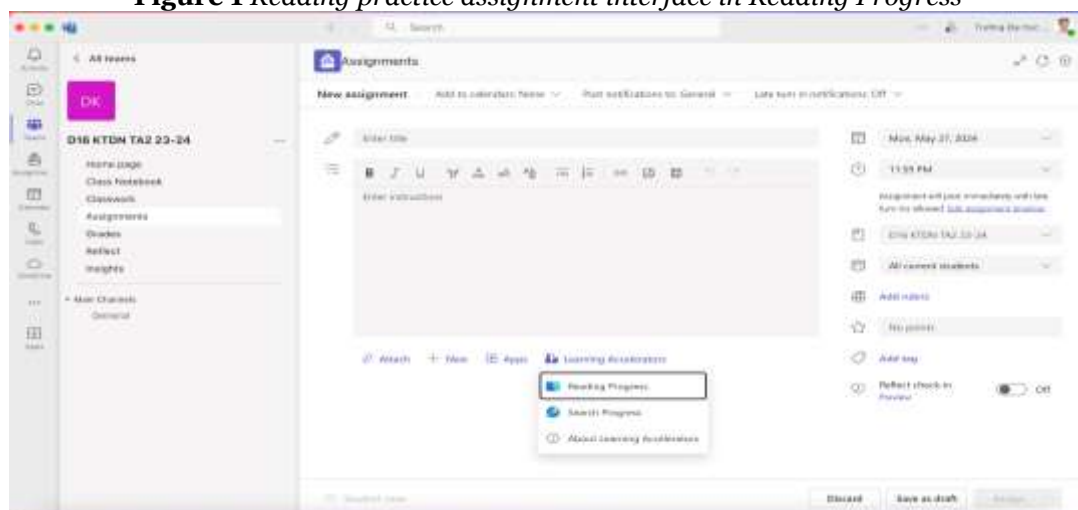
The process of applying Reading Progress is carried out based on the principle of weekly assignment. Class D14 (grade 6), English module 3, is the class with the highest number of assigned readings with 12 lessons within 12 weeks. Three classes in the 2nd semester of the 2021-2022 school year have the least number of assignments with 2 assignments (See Table 2).

Table 2 Assignments and delivery time

| Classes | Assignments | Delivery Time |
|-------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| 1 D12 Business Administration | 2 | Week 10 + 11 |
| 2 D14 Class no 2 English 2 | 2 | Week 10 + 11 |
| 3 D14 Business Administration | 5 | Week 9 + 10 + 11 + 12 + 13 |
| 4 D14 Travel | 4 | Week 9 + 10 + 11 + 12 |
| 5 D14 Class 6 English 3 | 12 | From week 2 to week 13 |

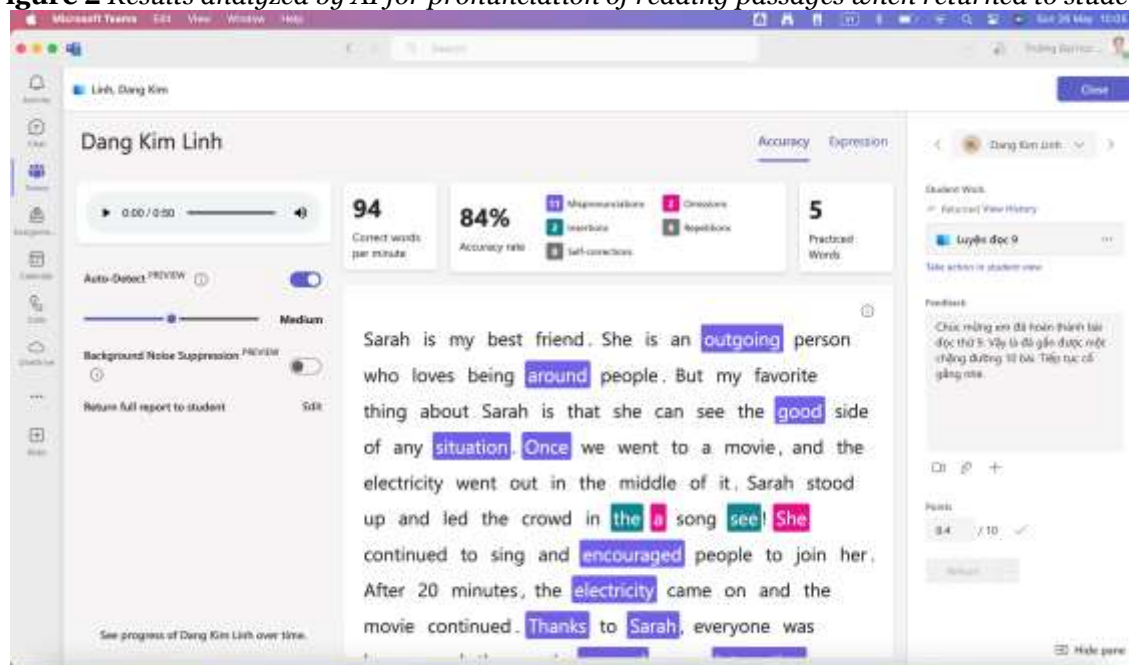
For each lesson, the lecturer selects content from the readings in the textbook used for the module. Lessons are saved as MS Words files in each class's teaching folder. And the length of each reading ranges from 50 to 100 words. In MS Teams, instructors assign assignments through the Assignments feature. Assignments are uploaded in the Reading Progress application under Learning Accelerators. After setting the essential parameters of Title, instructions, due date, and points, the assignment is automatically assigned to each student. And there is a notifications section (automatic notification) on the notification system to the MS Teams application that students have installed (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 Reading practice assignment interface in Reading Progress



When the submission deadline expires, the lecturer goes into the system, notes comments for students, and returns the results to students. Students will receive automatic analysis parameters from the AI technology integrated in the system. In which students will know their reading speed (correct words per minute), accuracy percentage (accuracy rate) with detailed analysis of the number of mispronunciations (mispronunciations), insertions, self-corrections, omissions, and repetitions. In addition, the system also suggests 5 words for students to practice pronunciation (See Figure 2).

Figure 2 Results analyzed by AI for pronunciation of reading passages when returned to students



3.2. Data collection and analysis

To survey students' opinions on the Reading Progress application in supporting students to practice pronunciation when studying some English modules, the study used an online questionnaire of 5 questions designed on the Google platform. Forms.

Question number 1 is "How would you rate the Reading Progress app?" Students choose 5 different response levels from 1 (Very boring) to 5 (Very interesting). Question 2 sought to find out students' views on the effectiveness of Reading Progress in supporting students in learning English pronunciation. Students give answers based on 5 levels: level 1 (lowest) - Completely disagree, and level 5 (highest level) - Completely agree. Question 3 collected data on students' perspectives on different aspects of Reading Progress (RP) such as PR helps me improve the pronunciation of single words better; PR helps me practice pronouncing sentence stress better; PR makes me have better reading speed; PR helps me read more fluently. Students can select multiple options from the given suggestions. At the same time, students can add their own opinions in the "Other" answer section. Question 4 explores the negative factors that make it difficult for students to use Reading Progress. In particular, the question suggests 3 difficulties: slow internet speed, low configuration of the device used, and complex features used in Reading Progress. This question also has an open design like question number 3 with an additional answer section with "Other" opinions. And the last question - Question No. 5, asks for opinions on the proposal to use Reading Progress more in teaching and learning English. There are 5 response levels for question 5 with level 1 (lowest level, Completely Disagree) and level 5 (highest level, Completely Agree).

The survey was sent with a link to students through the group of classes simultaneously on both Microsoft Teams and Zalo (a popular social network app in Vietnam). The response rate of students in all classes reached 100%. Data collected from the survey is automatically analyzed on Google Forms using the number of respondents and corresponding percentages.

4. Findings

Students' Overall Perspectives on the use of Reading Progress

Collected data for survey question number 1 shows 123 people's ratings on the level of fun of the "Reading Progress" application from 1 to 5, with 1 being "Very boring" and 5 being "Very interesting". Based on statistical data, some comments can be drawn as follows: The majority of users (58.5%, equivalent to 72 people) gave the highest rating of 5, showing that they like this application very much. Level 4 also has a quite high rate (33.3%, equivalent to 41 people), indicating that a significant number of users also feel satisfied. Very few users rated it low (1 and 2), with only 1 person rating it 2 (0.8%) and no one choosing 1, which shows that this application

rarely makes users feel dissatisfied. A small number of users (7.3%, equivalent to 9 people) gave a score of 3, which can be understood to mean that they feel this application is normal or does not meet their expectations. Overall, the "Reading Progress" app is rated positively by most users. Figures from the chart show that satisfaction is mostly on the positive side, with more than 90% of survey participants rating the app from average to very high. It can be concluded that this application is a useful tool in learning, especially in improving and progressing reading skills.

Students' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Reading Progress

Survey question number 2 was about students' evaluation of the effectiveness of Reading Progress in supporting English pronunciation learning. Collected data includes 123 responses and a rating scale from 1 (Completely ineffective) to 5 (Completely effective). It is shown that the majority of students rated the effectiveness of Reading Progress as positive, with 58.5% giving the highest score of 5. A significant portion of students (31.7%) rated it as 4. Only a small percentage of students rated it as 3 (8.9%), and an even smaller percentage rated it as 2 (0.8%). No student rated it as completely ineffective (1). This data shows that the majority of students find Reading Progress to be an effective tool in supporting English pronunciation learning.

Students' Perspectives on the Benefits of Reading Progress in Pronunciation Training

Results for survey question number indicate the positive aspects of Reading Progress (RP) as rated by students with a total of 123 responses. Specifically, the majority of students rated Reading Progress as having a positive effect on practicing and improving English pronunciation, with 65% (80/123 students) rating RP as helping to practice pronunciation and 64.2% (79/123 students) thought that RP improved pronunciation. More than half of students (52.8%, equivalent to 65/123 students) found that RP helped improve reading speed and 53.7% (66/123 students) said that RP helped to read more fluently. A very small percentage of students (0.8%) rated RP as helping them communicate better or communicate better with others, and also selected all of the above. These results show that students found Reading Progress to be mainly effective in practicing and improving pronunciation, while also having a positive impact on reading speed and fluency. Other aspects such as improved communication were rated highly by fewer students.

Difficulties Students Encountered When Using Reading Progress

Survey question number 4 was about the negative factors affecting the use of Reading Progress in Microsoft Teams. Accordingly, "Slow Internet speed" is the negative factor that most affects the use of Reading Progress, rated by 55.3% of students; "Low device configuration" is a problem that affects 30.1% of students; "Heavy Microsoft Teams software" was rated as a negative factor by 24.4% of students; Features used in complex RP" was a factor affecting 19.5% of students. Some students had no problems (2.4%) or rated Microsoft as excellent, had no opinion or thought Microsoft Teams was a waste of space (each factor accounted for 0.8%). This data shows that Internet speed and computer configuration are the two main negative factors affecting students' experience using Reading Progress in Microsoft Teams. Other issues such as software complexity and capacity of Microsoft Teams were also mentioned but were less common.

Students' Perspectives on the Possibility of More Application of Reading Progress into the Curriculum

Survey question number 5 was about students' opinions on whether Reading Progress should be applied more to the curriculum. Collected data includes 123 responses and a rating scale from 1 (Completely DISAGREE) to 5 (Completely AGREE). The results show that the majority of students completely agree with the opinion that Reading Progress should be applied more in the curriculum, with 69.1% giving a score of 5. Some students agree (22%) with this opinion, and gave it a score of 4. A small proportion of students (8.9%) rated it at a neutral level (score of 3). No student rated it lower than neutral (0% for scores 1 and 2). This shows that the majority of students support applying Reading Progress more into the curriculum, with the majority of students (91.1%) scoring 4 and 5, showing strong agreement with this opinion.

5. Discussion

It can be seen that the research results presented above show that the application of Reading Progress received positive evaluations from the students, who found it to be an interesting and effective tool for learning English pronunciation. The survey results indicated that 58.5% of students rated the tool as very interesting, and 33.3% found it quite interesting. In terms of effectiveness, 58.5% rated it as completely effective, while 31.7% rated it as very effective. These results align with the broader literature, which also highlights the tool's potential in enhancing pronunciation through its AI features.

The high engagement and positive perception of Reading Progress among students at Hoa Lu University mirror findings from other regions. For instance, studies in Thailand by Hongnaphadol and Attanak (2022) also reported reduced pronunciation anxiety and increased confidence among students using Reading Progress. Similarly, Prasetya (2022) found the tool effective in improving listening and speaking abilities in Indonesia, suggesting its broad applicability across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

The AI features of Reading Progress, particularly its automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology, play a crucial role in its effectiveness. This technology provides real-time feedback on pronunciation errors, allowing

for immediate correction and practice, which is consistent with effective pronunciation learning methods cited in the literature. The customization options available in Reading Progress, such as adjusting the sensitivity of pronunciation detection, further enhance its usability by catering to diverse learning styles and proficiency levels.

While the benefits of Reading Progress are clear, the implementation challenges identified at Hoa Lu University, such as slow internet speeds and low device configurations, highlight a common issue also noted in other studies. Jarrah (2024) identified similar obstacles in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the need for adequate training for educators and addressing technical difficulties to ensure the tool's successful integration into the classroom.

Comparing the effectiveness of Reading Progress with traditional pronunciation training methods, the Hoa Lu University study and other research underscore its superior ability to provide personalized, immediate feedback, and reduce anxiety. This is particularly important in pronunciation practice, where timely corrections are crucial for learning. However, more research is needed to fully explore the long-term impacts of Reading Progress on student performance and its comparative advantages over traditional methods.

Understanding stakeholder perspectives is vital for the successful adoption of any educational technology. Taylor et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of considering the views of educators, students, and administrators to optimize tool effectiveness. This aligns with the findings from Hoa Lu University, where the majority of students expressed strong support for integrating Reading Progress more extensively into the curriculum.

6. Conclusion

It can be seen that research at Hoa Lu University and other studies have the same result that Reading Progress is a useful tool in practicing English pronunciation. Positive reviews from students and noticeable improvements in pronunciation demonstrate the potential of this tool. Based on the results of this research, English training institutions and English instructors can refer to the following three pedagogical suggestions. First, Reading Progress should be integrated more deeply into the curriculum and teachers should be encouraged to use Reading Progress regularly in pronunciation exercises and periodic assessments to monitor student progress. Second, in-depth training courses should be organized for teachers on how to effectively use Reading Progress's AI features to optimize teaching. And third, Reading Progress's customization options should be used to meet students' diverse learning needs and styles, helping them feel more comfortable and confident when practicing pronunciation.

For the next research direction related to Reading Progress application, researchers can conduct long-term studies to evaluate the impact of Reading Progress on pronunciation skills and English communication ability of students over a long period of time, and survey and find solutions to overcome technical issues such as slow internet speed and low computer configuration to ensure all students have the best learning experience. Besides, researchers can conduct comparative studies between Reading Progress and traditional pronunciation training methods to clearly determine the benefits and limitations of each method. Thus, the Reading Progress application not only supports students in improving pronunciation but also makes an important contribution to innovation in English teaching. And continued research and application of this tool will bring more benefits to the language learning and teaching process.

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