



STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TIKTOK AS A SPEAKING LEARNING TOOL IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF MULAWARMAN UNIVERSITY

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Riwayat Artikel

Submitted:
02-11-2025
Accepted:
30-01-2026
Published:
01-02-2026

Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of students regarding the use of TikTok as a learning tool to enhance English speaking skills. In the digital era, social media platforms like TikTok are increasingly being utilized in educational contexts due to their interactive and accessible nature. This research focuses on students from the English Education Department at Mulawarman University and uses a descriptive qualitative method, involving questionnaires and interviews as data collection instruments. The results indicate that most students have a positive perception of TikTok as a supplementary tool in speaking practice. They believe that the platform helps them become more confident, motivated, and exposed to real-life English usage. Additionally, creating content on TikTok allows students to express themselves creatively and engage more actively with the language. However, some challenges such as distractions and the absence of structured academic feedback were also identified. Overall, TikTok is considered a useful and innovative tool that can support speaking skill development when used effectively in a learning environment.

Keywords: Tiktok; Students' Perception; Speaking Skills; Language Learning; English Education.

Jurnal MADINASIKA diterbitkan oleh Fakultas Pascasarjana, Program Studi Magister Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, Universitas Majalengka

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan TikTok sebagai alat pembelajaran untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris. Di era digital, platform media sosial seperti TikTok semakin banyak dimanfaatkan dalam konteks pendidikan karena sifatnya yang interaktif dan mudah diakses. Penelitian ini berfokus pada mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Mulawarman dan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan kuesioner serta wawancara sebagai instrumen pengumpulan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa memiliki persepsi positif terhadap TikTok sebagai alat pendukung dalam latihan berbicara. Mereka menilai bahwa platform ini membantu meningkatkan kepercayaan diri, motivasi, serta memberikan paparan terhadap penggunaan bahasa Inggris yang autentik. Selain itu, kegiatan membuat dan membagikan konten di TikTok mendorong mahasiswa untuk mengekspresikan diri secara kreatif dan lebih aktif berinteraksi dengan bahasa. Namun, beberapa tantangan juga ditemukan, seperti gangguan dari konten non-edukatif dan tidak adanya umpan balik akademik yang terstruktur. Secara keseluruhan, TikTok dianggap sebagai platform yang bermanfaat dan inovatif yang dapat mendukung pengembangan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris apabila digunakan secara efektif dalam lingkungan pembelajaran..

Kata Kunci: Tiktok; Persepsi Mahasiswa; Keterampilan Berbicara, Belajar Bahasa; Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris.

INTRODUCTION

Humans cannot live alone, therefore humans need to communicate with others. One of the easiest ways to communicate with others is by talking. Every region must have its own language, but English is the international language or the language that many people use around the world. English must be difficult for some people, especially if there are no sources of information or instructors. When in fact if we want to learn independently and always hone our speaking skills, then we will be able and fluent in speaking foreign languages (Tahir, 2015: 174).

There are still many students in Indonesia who are afraid or unsure about learning a foreign language. To be fluent in a foreign language, we must practice a lot and speak directly. Students who have limited vocabulary knowledge may be less inclined to communicate in English. Because students will struggle if they do not know the English language of an object. There are four major issues that affect students' speaking anxiety: they lack confidence in speaking English, they are afraid of speaking English, they cannot fulfill the minimum requirements, and the methods used are unappealing (Nurnalisa, 2020).

More jobs require English language skills as technology advances. As an outcome, the ability to communicate is one of the most important of the three elements (Srinivas, 2019). Nonetheless, many alumni are still not fluent in a foreign language. Additionally, if they are fluent and self-confident, they can get the job they want. As a result, students are taught how to speak correctly, how to manage their anxiety and embarrassment when speaking a foreign language, and how to develop self-confidence when speaking English. We can also learn the above independently by using applications created by a major number of developers. There are applications that can help students learn about speaking, as well as tips and tricks and numerous examples that can be used as learning benchmarks.

There are many applications on mobile phones that have many benefits in terms of entertainment, knowledge, and even learning in this increasingly modern era. TikTok is one of them. It is a multipurpose platform with many content creators who provide a variety of video content ranging from entertainment to learning in short but clear videos.

According to many experts, English is one of the languages that is widely used to express ideas and share extensive information with people all over the world (Rao, 2019). In the internet era, social interaction is also growing and becoming more focused on imaginative work, but this is also dependent on other factors such as time, situation, and social conditions.

In this increasingly modern era, there are also many teachers who provide learning through social media as a tool for intermediary learning, because social media can also attract the attention and interest of many students. Apart from learning, social media can also be an exciting thing to explore more deeply. Even though many applications are actually only designed for entertainment, many teachers and also content creators use social media as a tool to make some learning media look more interesting and not monotonous.

Social media was not originally intended for education, but offered how much interest the majority of people have in using it, it has intrigued the interest of academics, particularly those who work as speakers or English teachers. Aside from that, learning through social media does not necessitate teachers and students always meeting face to face, so it is quite practical. Teachers use social media and ask students to access various types of information, group discussions, and entertainment to keep students from becoming uninteresting while studying (Liando & Adam, 2018).

In September of 2016, the Chinese company ByteDance Inc. released TikTok, an application that allows its users to freely create their own short videos. TikTok itself only entered Indonesia in September 2017. TikTok itself is very simple to use; users can make lip-sync videos with a duration of around 15 seconds, and they can also add various effects to make their videos more interesting. According to Viv Gong, TikTok's Head of Marketing, Indonesia is one of the company's main targets because it is the sixth largest internet user after China, the United States, India, Brazil, and Japan. And, as predicted, TikTok is in high demand among many groups in Indonesia, so TikTok has grown in popularity. However, its popularity has sparked a lot of debate because this application is intended for teenagers, but it is actually intended for children aged 7 to 15. As a result, the Ministry of Communication and Informatics blocked TikTok in Indonesia in July 2018.

Following that, TikTok's CEO, Kelly Zhang, and his team took immediate action to improve the requirements proposed by the Indonesian government, including raising the minimum age to 16 years old and removing negative content from the application. With TikTok's unblocking, content creators who create learning content, such as learning English, have begun to emerge. The majority of content creators who provide learning content also make videos with a question and answer session in the comments column, which engages the audience in interacting and learning together. This is an important component for student success in learning, as evidenced by the interactions in the comments column. Contemporary teaching is a method that has been adapted for social media and allows for collaboration and creativity (Mozes & Liando, 2020).

Learning English through social media can encourage independent learning. Independent learning can also allow students stay focused on digesting what they see, hear, and practice by themselves (Silen & Uhlin, 2008). Independent learning for students can also be seen through the students' own perceptions (Sarkol, 2016). Perception is a specific understanding of a situation or environment with the intention of consciously achieving something.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a group of different internet-based apps built on advanced philosophy and technology that enables the generation and distribution of a variety of generated material for its consumers. Currently there are many types of social media, one of which is TikTok as the author mentioned above. and with the existence of TikTok which is based on video, visuals and sound, this is interesting because it can help many people to improve one's speaking abilities.

Based on the description above, the researcher decided to conduct research on how students perceive TikTok as a tool for learning English speaking skill. The similarity between this research and the research currently being researched is that they both examine TikTok videos for learning English. The difference is that the research focuses on the benefits of the TikTok application as a tool for learning English, while the research that will be conducted will focus more on students college's perception speaking skill learning through TikTok videos and the benefits in using TikTok videos for learning English speaking skill.

The researcher is inspired to conduct this study for a variety of reasons. The researcher would like to begin by discussing the use of social media, which is very familiar and popular among students. Second, the researcher is interested in learning how students perceive the TikTok application as a tool for learning how to speak well through content provided by TikTok content creators. Finally, the researcher wishes to make this study a future reference for students interested in researching speaking learning through social media.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative design. A qualitative design, instead of relying on numerical data, seeks to provide a comprehensive image and in-depth knowledge through interpretation and description. According to Creswell (2012) says that qualitative research discusses the problem by examining finding information via text analysis and verbal interpretation of the results. This research process included developing a method for collecting data in the participants' surroundings, evaluating the data, progressing from details to general themes, and generating interpretations on the meaning of the data. The final report was composed in a flexible manner. These expert claims align with the current study that examines the use of TikTok videos for learning English speaking skill As a result, this qualitative design aims to closely examine the phenomena of the participants' learning process through TikTok video.

This research is divided into two types of data collection, namely: (1) Basic (primary) data is information obtained from the TikTok application, especially features that can support the learning process. (2) Supporting (secondary) data is data obtained from literature that supports the main (primary) data, such as information from the internet, journals, and books related to research. Since the study employed a case study method, this study use interview. Based on Creswell (2013) to collect the data using interview, researcher needs to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants.

In qualitative research, the term population is not known, let alone sample. Population or samples in a qualitative approach are more accurately called data sources in certain social situations. Spradley (as cited in Sugiyono, 2011:297) says that a social situation consists of three elements, namely: place, actors, and activity which interact synergistically. In this research, the data source uses a purposive sample which focuses on selected informants who are rich in cases for in-depth study. The researcher will use students from the FKIP English Study Program Class of 2022 at Mulawarman University as participants.

Qualitative data analysis will be used to analyze the data collected throughout the interview. The data is analyzed using thematic content analysis. It aims to identify common themes in a collection of data. The researcher used the technique that Braun & Clarke (2006) suggested to analyze qualitative interviews. Analyzing qualitative data involves the following steps: Familiarizing data and Generating initial codes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Students' General Perceptions of Using TikTok for Speaking Practice

All participants expressed positive attitudes toward using TikTok as a tool for enhancing English speaking skills. The platform was praised for its engaging and accessible format, which helped participants integrate English learning into their daily routines.

"It's a fun way to learn without feeling like I'm studying." (Interview with Participant 2)

TikTok was seen as a useful complement to traditional learning methods, rather than a replacement. While it provided real-life context and casual language exposure, participants acknowledged that it lacked the depth of formal instruction, particularly in grammar and writing.

"I use TikTok to practice what I've learned in class." (Interview with Participant 5)

Participants highlighted specific features that were particularly beneficial 1). Captions/subtitles for improving pronunciation; 2). Duet and stitch functions for interactive speaking practice; and 3). Live streams for exposure to real-time English use.

"I repeat after the speaker to practice pronunciation." (Interview with Participant 1)

Participants will listen and then practice the creator's pronunciation so that this can help articulation, intonation, and rhythm. Students reported high engagement when using TikTok for learning English, aligning with studies that highlight the effectiveness of social media in promoting informal language learning (Gao et al., 2020). Unlike traditional classroom methods, TikTok offers bite-sized, visually engaging content that lowers affective barriers to speaking. This supports Krashen's (1982), Affective Filter Hypothesis, suggesting that a relaxed, fun environment enhances language acquisition.

2. Motivation and Engagement

Exposure to authentic content and frequent informal practice contributed to increased confidence in speaking. Some participants even recorded and shared their own English videos on the platform.

"I gained more confidence after mimicking creators and posting my own videos." (Interview with Participant 1)

The brief nature of TikTok videos made learning feel manageable and less overwhelming. However, this format was also seen as a limitation for topics requiring in-depth explanation.

"It keeps things simple and easy to remember." (Interview with Participant 1)

"Good for expressions, but not for deep grammar." (Interview with Participant 5)

This application is very useful for everyday life but lacks the complexity needed for in-depth grammar. This emphasizes that TikTok's function is only as a communication tool, and not a substitute for formal learning.

Participants consistently emphasized that TikTok cannot fully replace formal instruction. This finding echoes prior research (Manca, 2020; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), which found that digital platforms are most effective when used to supplement, rather than substitute, classroom-based learning. Students benefit from TikTok's real-life usage examples but still rely on school-based instruction for grammar, structure, and detailed feedback.

3. Challenges and Distractions.

Participants reported several challenges 1). Distractions from non-educational content; 2). Lack of structured lessons; and 3). No formal feedback on speaking. To manage distractions, students employed strategies such as curating their feed, bookmarking educational videos, and setting time limits.

"There's no real feedback, so I don't know if I'm saying things the right way." (Interview with Participant 3)

It shows that if participants imitate the creator, they can increase their self-confidence and can understand how to pronounce correctly.

"It shows how to speak correctly in context." (Interview with Participant 5)

The statement above shows that the TikTok application can provide real examples through content from creators and they can learn it according to context and easy to understand. Students experienced a boost in confidence and were motivated to speak more frequently, consistent with previous studies on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) which found that personalized, self-paced apps foster motivation and confidence (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). Posting and mimicking videos allowed students to experiment without the fear of classroom embarrassment.

4. Students' Strategies to Overcome Learning Challenges

The participants want TikTok to be more assertive in providing verification to creators who truly have the potential to be teachers so that participants are more confident that the creator is teaching something trustworthy.

"TikTok should promote verified educational creators more clearly." (Interview with Participant 5)

From the excerpt above, a verified educational creator is essential. A verified educational creator on TikTok is essential because the verification badge builds trust and credibility with followers, signaling authenticity and helping to combat misinformation. This is particularly important in the educational space, where users need to be confident they are receiving accurate and reliable information from trusted sources.

Participants reported improvements in pronunciation and intonation by mimicking native speakers. This aligns with the Shadowing Technique (Murphey, 2001), where learners repeat

speech immediately after hearing it, improving fluency and speech rhythm. TikTok's native speech exposure functions as an informal pronunciation lab, especially when content includes subtitles.

5. Students' Recommendations and Needs for Improving TikTok as a Learning Tool

Students perceive TikTok as an engaging and motivational platform that supports their English speaking development, especially in pronunciation, confidence, and natural expression. Despite its benefits, TikTok poses challenges such as distractions and inconsistent content quality. This highlights the need for digital literacy skills (Reinders & White, 2016) to help learners filter valuable content from entertainment. However, it is best used as a supplementary tool due to its limitations in structured learning and content depth.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that TikTok serves as an engaging and effective supplementary tool for improving students' English speaking skills. The platform provides authentic exposure to real-life language use and encourages learners to practice pronunciation, intonation, and expression in a fun and informal environment. Students reported higher motivation and confidence when learning through TikTok, as it allows them to practice freely, creatively, and without fear of judgment.

However, despite these advantages, TikTok also presents certain challenges such as distractions from non-educational content, lack of structured learning, and absence of formal feedback. Therefore, it cannot fully replace traditional classroom instruction, particularly in grammar and writing aspects. Instead, TikTok is best utilized as a complementary learning resource that enhances formal education.

Students also emphasized the importance of promoting verified educational creators to ensure the accuracy and credibility of learning content. Furthermore, digital literacy skills are essential to help learners distinguish valuable educational materials from entertainment. In summary, TikTok has significant potential as an innovative and motivational learning platform that supports independent and informal language learning. When integrated wisely alongside formal instruction, it can effectively contribute to the improvement of students' English speaking proficiency, confidence, and communicative competence.

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