

EFL Learners' Experiences in Using Tiktok to Enhance Pronunciation and Speaking Fluency

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners use TikTok to improve their pronunciation and speaking fluency. Recognizing the growing influence of social media in education, the research investigates the ways in which students integrate TikTok into their language learning practices. A descriptive qualitative design was employed to capture students' lived experiences. Nine undergraduate students from AMIK ITMI Medan participated in semi-structured interviews and shared their TikTok-based speaking activities. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights. The findings reveal that TikTok serves as a practical and engaging tool for developing oral skills. Students used short video features to imitate native speakers, repeat expressions, and refine their pronunciation through multiple recordings. The process also improved their fluency as repeated performance reduced hesitation and increased speech confidence. Moreover, the platform's interactive and entertaining nature fostered motivation, enjoyment, and a sense of achievement. Despite these benefits, some challenges were noted, including distractions from non-academic content, the use of informal language, and technical barriers. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that TikTok can function as an effective supplementary platform for EFL speaking practice. It provides authentic exposure, encourages self-directed learning, and enhances motivation in a low-pressure environment. The results suggest that teachers should guide students in purposeful use of TikTok, balancing creativity with structured learning objectives to maximize its pedagogical value.

Keywords: EFL, Pronunciation, Speaking Fluency

INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital transformation, the use of social media has penetrated almost every aspect of human life, including the domain of education. The emergence of platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok has introduced new ways of accessing information and knowledge, particularly for younger generations who are already familiar with digital culture. In recent years, TikTok has gained unprecedented popularity due to its short-form, engaging, and easily consumable video content. This platform has not only been used for entertainment purposes but has also gradually transformed into an informal learning environment where users can learn a wide range of skills, including foreign languages (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Manca, 2021). The

rapid diffusion of TikTok into students' daily lives provides a unique opportunity to explore its role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, specifically in the development of speaking skills, which remain one of the most challenging aspects for learners.

Speaking competence holds a central place in EFL learning because it represents the ability to use the language for communication in real contexts. Among the different aspects of speaking, pronunciation and fluency are critical indicators of communicative success. Learners often report difficulties in pronouncing words accurately and maintaining fluency in extended speech (Derakhshan et al., 2022). Traditional classroom settings may not always provide sufficient opportunities for repeated oral practice, immediate feedback, or authentic exposure to natural language use. This limitation encourages the search for alternative approaches and tools that can supplement classroom instruction. In this respect, digital platforms such as TikTok can offer meaningful input and authentic practice opportunities in a low-pressure environment where learners are motivated by creativity and social interaction.

Recent research highlights the academic and practical importance of integrating digital platforms into language learning. Studies have shown that social media provides learners with multimodal input, promotes learner autonomy, and fosters motivation through interactive and authentic content (Zou et al., 2021; Yunus & Ang, 2021). Specifically, TikTok's features — such as short videos, duet functions, and trending challenges — allow learners to imitate native speakers, practice speaking through repetition, and gain confidence in their oral performance. For example, Kusumawati and Widyaningrum (2022) reported that students perceived TikTok as a helpful tool for improving vocabulary and pronunciation, while Liu and Zhang (2023) found that learners who actively engaged in TikTok-based speaking tasks showed increased fluency and speaking confidence. These findings indicate that TikTok, though initially designed for entertainment, has significant potential as an informal language learning platform.

Nevertheless, the existing body of research is still fragmented and inconclusive. A number of studies have focused primarily on students' motivation and engagement with TikTok (Ariyanti, 2021; Basri et al., 2022), while others explored its contribution to vocabulary acquisition or general language exposure (Aljunaidi, 2023). Although these studies provide valuable insights, relatively few have examined in depth how TikTok specifically supports the development of speaking sub-skills such as pronunciation and fluency. Moreover, most previous studies rely on quantitative survey methods, which offer broad patterns of perception but may not capture the richness of learners' lived experiences in using TikTok as a learning tool. There is also limited research focusing on the context of Indonesian tertiary institutions, where the integration of social media into EFL practice remains an underexplored area. These gaps underscore the need for qualitative inquiry that can provide nuanced descriptions of how learners actually experience TikTok as a medium for oral practice.

This study is designed to fill that gap by focusing on the experiences of students at AMIK ITMI, an Indonesian higher education institution specializing in Informatics

and Management. Students at AMIK ITMI, like many young adults in Indonesia, are active users of TikTok in their daily lives. Exploring their experiences with TikTok in the context of learning English allows for a better understanding of how informal digital practices intersect with formal academic goals. By emphasizing pronunciation and speaking fluency, the study narrows its scope to two critical yet often overlooked aspects of oral competence. The central research problem guiding this study is: How do AMIK ITMI students experience and interpret their use of TikTok in improving pronunciation and speaking fluency?

The objectives of this research are threefold. First, it seeks to identify the specific practices students engage in when using TikTok for English speaking practice. Second, it aims to explore learners' perceptions of how these practices affect their pronunciation and fluency. Third, it investigates the challenges and limitations students encounter when relying on TikTok as a learning medium. Addressing these objectives is expected to provide both theoretical contributions — by expanding the literature on social media in EFL speaking development — and practical implications for educators who wish to integrate digital tools into their teaching strategies.

The contribution of this study lies in its descriptive qualitative approach, which captures learners' subjective experiences in rich detail. Unlike large-scale surveys that measure general attitudes, qualitative exploration provides in-depth narratives about the ways students interact with TikTok, the strategies they employ, and the meanings they attribute to their experiences. Such insights are vital in developing pedagogical approaches that align with students' digital practices while maintaining academic goals. Furthermore, the study offers localized evidence from the Indonesian context, thereby enriching the global conversation on social media and language learning with perspectives from Southeast Asia.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a literature review, discussing theoretical perspectives on speaking skills, the role of pronunciation and fluency in EFL contexts, and previous research on the use of TikTok and other social media in language learning. This is followed by the research methodology, which explains the descriptive qualitative design, participant selection, data collection, and analysis procedures. The findings and discussion section then presents thematic insights into how AMIK ITMI students use TikTok for oral practice, the benefits they perceive, and the challenges they encounter. Finally, the paper concludes with pedagogical implications, limitations, and directions for future research in order to maximize the use of TikTok and similar platforms in enhancing EFL speaking competence.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design in order to capture the lived experiences of students in using TikTok to enhance their English speaking skills, specifically pronunciation and fluency. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth insights into how learners perceived and interpreted their own practices rather than measuring

their experiences numerically. The descriptive nature of the study provided a systematic account of the phenomenon without imposing experimental manipulation, which aligned with the research objectives.

Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted at AMIK ITMI Medan, an institution of higher education specializing in informatics and management. English is taught as a compulsory subject in the first and second semesters, with an emphasis on developing communicative competence for academic and professional purposes. Students at AMIK ITMI are predominantly digital natives who actively engage with social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube on a daily basis. This context made them an ideal population for exploring the role of TikTok in language learning.

The target population of this study comprised undergraduate students enrolled in English courses at AMIK ITMI. The unit of analysis was the individual learner, as the focus was on capturing personal experiences and perceptions. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who met specific criteria: (1) being an active TikTok user, (2) having experience in watching or creating English-related TikTok content, and (3) willingness to share their experiences in depth.

Initially, the researcher aimed to involve around 10 participants, which is generally sufficient for achieving data saturation in small-scale qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The realized sample size was 9 students, which proved adequate as no new themes emerged after the ninth interview. Although the relatively small number of participants limited the generalizability of the findings, it provided rich and detailed accounts consistent with the descriptive qualitative approach.

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 years old, with varying levels of English proficiency (lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate). The gender distribution included five female and four male students, reflecting a relatively balanced profile.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation of students' TikTok practices. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provided a flexible framework to explore participants' experiences while allowing for probing questions and elaboration. An interview guide was prepared with open-ended questions focusing on (1) how students used TikTok for speaking practice, (2) their perceptions of its impact on pronunciation and fluency, and (3) challenges or limitations they encountered. Each interview lasted between 30–45 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian to ensure clarity and comfort, although participants occasionally shifted to English when describing their practices. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to interviews, the researcher observed participants' activities on TikTok by asking them to share examples of videos they had watched or created that

were relevant to English learning. This strategy provided complementary data on the actual content and practices that students engaged with, allowing for triangulation between self-reported accounts and observed behavior. The researcher maintained field notes to document contextual information during this process.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Transcripts were read multiple times to gain an overall understanding before being systematically coded. Codes were then grouped into categories that reflected recurring patterns, such as “pronunciation practice through imitation,” “fluency through repetition,” “motivation and enjoyment,” and “technical or linguistic challenges.” These categories were refined into broader themes that captured the essence of learners’ experiences.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, strategies such as member checking and peer debriefing were employed. Participants were invited to review summaries of their interview data to confirm accuracy and interpretation. The researcher also engaged in discussions with colleagues to reduce potential bias in theme identification.

Justification of Methodological Choices

The choice of a descriptive qualitative design was justified by the research aim, which was to explore learners’ subjective experiences rather than test hypotheses or establish causal relationships. Purposive sampling ensured that only students with relevant experiences were included, thereby increasing the relevance and richness of the data. Although the sample size was limited, qualitative research emphasizes depth and context-specific insights rather than generalizability. Semi-structured interviews were scientifically sound because they balanced consistency across participants with flexibility to explore unique perspectives. Observation of actual TikTok practices provided triangulation, which strengthened the credibility of the findings. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is widely recognized as a robust and systematic approach for identifying and interpreting patterns in qualitative data.

This study adhered to ethical research standards. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings, and all personal identifiers were removed from transcripts. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely and were only accessible to the researcher.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher obtained the data by conducting semi-structured interviews with nine undergraduate students at AMIK ITMI who actively use TikTok for English

learning. During the interviews, the participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences, challenges, and strategies in practicing English speaking through the platform. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and systematically analyzed to identify recurring themes and unique perspectives.

From this analysis, four main themes emerged: (1) TikTok as a medium for pronunciation practice, (2) speaking fluency through repeated performance, (3) motivation and engagement, and (4) challenges and limitations. Each theme is presented with direct quotations from participants, coded as P1–P9, to ensure that the findings reflect their authentic voices and lived experiences.

The following sections describe each theme in detail, supported by participants' narratives, illustrative examples, and summary tables that highlight the most salient aspects of the findings.

1. TikTok as a Medium for Pronunciation Practice

A major finding of this study is that TikTok served as an effective medium for practicing English pronunciation. Most participants found that the short duration of TikTok videos made pronunciation practice less overwhelming and more manageable compared to other resources such as movies or long YouTube videos.

"I like to repeat the same video again and again until my pronunciation sounds similar. It is easier because the video is short." (P3)

Participants also noted the usefulness of recording their own voices and comparing them with the original TikTok audio. This process allowed them to notice differences in intonation, stress, and articulation.

"When I record myself and compare it to the original, I can hear the difference and try to fix my mistakes." (P7)

Another strategy mentioned was the use of TikTok's duet feature, which gave students the opportunity to "speak alongside" the original speaker, simulating conversational practice in a fun and engaging way.

Table 1. Students' Reported Strategies for Pronunciation Practice

Strategy	Frequency (out of 9)	Description
Repeating native speaker lines	8	Mimicking short video phrases repeatedly
Recording and self-correcting	6	Comparing own speech with the video
Using duet feature	5	Practicing interaction by "acting together"

2. Speaking Fluency Through Repeated Performance

Beyond pronunciation, participants reported that TikTok helped them become more fluent speakers. The process of recording multiple takes before uploading a video required students to rehearse lines several times, gradually reducing hesitation and increasing fluency.

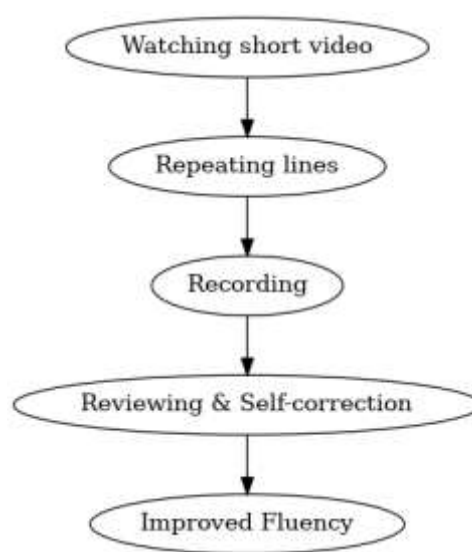
“At first I needed many takes, but after some time I could say it faster and more fluently.” (P5)

“The more I practiced the same line for TikTok, the more natural it became. It helped me to speak without stopping too much.” (P2)

Interestingly, some students noticed that their fluency improvements extended beyond TikTok practice and into classroom or everyday conversations.

“Because I already practiced many times for TikTok, I felt braver when speaking English with my friends in class.” (P9)

This indicates that TikTok functioned not only as a practice tool but also as a confidence-building space for oral communication.



(Figure description: watching → repeating → recording → reviewing → improved fluency)

Figure 1. Cycle of Fluency Development through TikTok Practice

3. Motivation and Engagement Fostered by TikTok

TikTok’s entertaining nature contributed strongly to students’ motivation and willingness to practice speaking. Many students compared TikTok practice to classroom tasks, noting that it felt less intimidating and more enjoyable.

“Speaking in class makes me nervous, but on TikTok it feels fun, like acting or joining a trend.” (P1)

Another important motivator was the social feedback students received through likes, comments, or shares from their peers. Positive responses increased their confidence and encouraged them to continue practicing.

“When my friends like or comment on my video, it makes me feel proud and more confident to keep practicing.” (P4)

Students also described TikTok as a consistent and engaging routine, blending learning with entertainment in a way that sustained their interest.

Table 2. Motivational Factors of Using TikTok

Motivational Factor	Students reporting (N=9)	Example
Enjoyment/creativity	8	Acting in skits, challenges

Peer/online feedback	5	Likes, comments, duet responses
Reduced anxiety	7	Feeling relaxed compared to class

4. Challenges and Limitations

Despite the benefits, participants also identified challenges and limitations of using TikTok for language learning. The most common problem was distraction: students admitted that they often ended up scrolling through unrelated content instead of focusing on practice.

"Sometimes I want to practice English, but after a while I just scroll and forget my purpose." (P8)

Another issue was the informal nature of English on TikTok, which sometimes conflicted with academic needs.

"TikTok helps with speaking, but sometimes the English is too casual. I need more formal expressions for class." (P6)

Finally, technical barriers such as weak internet connections, background noise, or low-quality devices occasionally interfered with practice.

"When the internet is slow, the sound is not clear, and it makes practicing harder." (P9)

Table 3. Reported Challenges of Using TikTok for English Learning

Challenge	Students reporting (N=9)	Description
Distraction	7	Unrelated scrolling, loss of focus
Informal language focus	6	Slang and casual expressions
Technical issues	4	Poor internet or device limitations

In summary, TikTok provided AMIK ITMI students with a practical and enjoyable tool for practicing English speaking. Its short-form videos made pronunciation practice easier, repeated recording improved fluency, and the platform's social and creative aspects fostered motivation. Students also reported reduced speaking anxiety compared to classroom tasks.

However, the findings also revealed limitations: distractions, informal language exposure, and technical barriers restricted its effectiveness. These insights suggest that while TikTok can serve as a valuable supplementary learning tool, it should be integrated with guidance from instructors to maximize benefits and minimize drawbacks.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to explore how AMIK ITMI students used TikTok to practice their speaking skills, especially pronunciation and fluency. The contribution of this study is to show that TikTok, which is mostly known as an entertainment platform, can also become a learning tool when students use it for practicing English. The findings show that students did not only watch videos for fun, but they also repeated words, imitated native speakers, recorded themselves many times, and tried to make their speaking clearer and more fluent. This makes the study

important because it gives a picture of how students in an Indonesian context combine social media with language learning in a practical way. Similar studies in other contexts also reported that TikTok can support microlearning and short practice activities (Anwar & Aprilisanda, 2021; Huang, 2022; Syahrial & Haryanto, 2023).

The first important finding is that TikTok helped students practice pronunciation. They said that the short videos were easy to follow because they were not too long. When they heard English phrases or sentences, they repeated them and recorded their voices until they felt more confident. This practice is similar to “shadowing technique” that is often used in language learning, where students repeat after a model. The short and simple form of TikTok videos makes this technique easier to do. Other studies also reported that TikTok and similar platforms can help learners improve their pronunciation when they practice actively (Putri & Dewi, 2022; Rahman & Kamil, 2021). This finding shows that digital microlearning platforms, when used consistently, can give students new opportunities to improve their oral skills in a less formal environment.

The second finding is related to speaking fluency. Students mentioned that they became more fluent because they often recorded several takes before posting a video. The habit of repeating and practicing many times made their speech smoother and reduced hesitation. They also felt that after practicing on TikTok, they could speak more naturally in the classroom. This can be explained by the principle of practice and automatization: the more often students speak, the more automatic their speaking becomes. Research on fluency training also shows that repeated speaking tasks can improve fluency (Chang, 2023; Zhang & Zou, 2021). Recent studies with TikTok found similar results, where students who recorded themselves speaking English became faster and more confident in expressing their ideas (Syahrial & Haryanto, 2023; Putri & Dewi, 2022).

Another important result is about motivation and comfort. Students felt that TikTok made speaking practice more enjoyable. They were less afraid of making mistakes compared to speaking in class. They also liked receiving feedback from friends in the form of likes or comments, which motivated them to practice more. This finding connects with Krashen’s (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that low anxiety supports better learning. Social support and positive feedback made the students’ practice more consistent. Other studies also found that social media can create a less formal environment that encourages learners to use English more often (Alwahoub & Busalim, 2022; Wang & Chen, 2020; Manca, 2020).

However, the study also found some challenges. Students admitted that TikTok is full of entertainment content, and sometimes they got distracted by videos that were not related to learning. Another problem is that not all English used on TikTok is formal or standard; some videos use slang or non-standard pronunciation, which can confuse learners. Technical problems such as poor internet connection also made it difficult for some students to upload or record smoothly. These challenges are similar to what other researchers reported. A systematic review by Kohnke and Moorhouse (2022) explained that while the platform is motivating, it also has risks like distraction

and lack of control over the quality of materials. Likewise, studies by Ali (2020) and Rashid and Asghar (2016) emphasized that technology integration requires balance, as overreliance on digital tools without guidance can lead to poor outcomes.

There are several possible explanations why TikTok appeared to be useful for speaking practice in this study. First, the short video format provides learners with manageable input, which helps them focus on specific language chunks such as sounds, stress, or intonation without being overwhelmed. This process, often referred to as cognitive chunking, makes pronunciation practice easier and less intimidating (Silva, 2022; Sung et al., 2016). Second, the repeated recording process allows students to gradually refine their speaking. Many participants explained that they recorded several times before feeling satisfied, and this repetition helped them become more fluent and reduce hesitation (Chang, 2023; Zhang & Zou, 2021). Finally, the social features of TikTok, such as likes, comments, and the possibility of sharing videos with peers, created additional motivation. Students felt encouraged to practice more consistently because their efforts were recognized and appreciated by others (Putri & Dewi, 2022; Syahrial & Haryanto, 2023). Taken together, these three aspects—cognitive chunking, repeated practice, and social motivation—explain why students viewed TikTok as an effective tool for improving their English speaking skills.

Even though the results are positive, this study has some limitations. It only involved nine students from one institution, so the results cannot be generalized to all Indonesian students. The data also came from interviews, which means it is based on students' perceptions. There was no objective test before and after to measure whether their pronunciation and fluency really improved. Future research should use a larger sample, combine interviews with tests, and maybe compare groups who use TikTok with those who do not. This way, the results will be stronger and more reliable.

To sum up, this study shows that TikTok can support speaking practice in EFL classrooms, especially pronunciation and fluency. Students used TikTok not only for entertainment but also as a tool for repetition, rehearsal, and motivation. The findings give practical implications: teachers can integrate TikTok tasks into speaking classes, but they should also guide students to focus on useful content and avoid distractions. TikTok is not a replacement for classroom teaching, but it can be a useful supplement if used with clear learning goals.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that students' perceptions of using TikTok for English speaking practice are mostly positive. Students expressed that TikTok helps them build confidence, makes speaking practice feel more enjoyable, and allows them to explore English in a relaxed way. They also appreciated the chance to repeat their recordings until satisfied, which gave them more control in learning pronunciation and fluency. However, some students admitted that distractions from unrelated content or fear of making mistakes in front of others became challenges in the process. Still, most students recognized TikTok as a useful tool to support their speaking skills when guided properly.

For English teachers, it is suggested to consider TikTok as a complementary learning platform in speaking classes, especially when students need more motivation and confidence. By integrating TikTok tasks with classroom activities, teachers can create a more engaging environment and encourage students to practice beyond the classroom walls. At the same time, teachers should also be aware of possible drawbacks, such as students becoming too focused on entertainment rather than learning. Therefore, TikTok use should be balanced, directed, and combined with structured teaching methods, not as a replacement for formal instruction.

Future research can explore this topic with a larger and more diverse group of participants, or by comparing TikTok with other short-video platforms like Instagram Reels or YouTube Shorts. It would also be useful to conduct studies that measure both perceptions and actual language improvement, so that the benefits of TikTok in speaking practice can be seen more clearly. With these opportunities, further studies may provide deeper insights into how social media can contribute to foreign language education in the digital era.

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