

DUETS AND STITCHES: EXPLORING TIKTOK AS A SUPPLEMENTARY ENGLISH SPEAKING TOOL FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates university students' perceptions of using TikTok as a supplementary tool for developing English speaking skills, identifying both the practical pedagogical benefits and the learning challenges they encounter in Indonesian higher education. The investigation was carried out specifically within the Speaking Class of the 2024 academic batch in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University, Palu, Indonesia. Employing an explanatory mixed-methods research design, quantitative data were gathered through a closed-ended four-point Likert-scale questionnaire distributed to 19 undergraduate students. In addition, qualitative data were collected through in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 5 purposively selected informants to gain detailed experiential insights. Quantitative survey responses were evaluated using descriptive statistics (frequency distributions and percentages), while qualitative interview transcripts were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's systematic framework. The empirical findings indicate that 89.5% of students perceived TikTok as an accessible, engaging, and beneficial mobile application for spoken language practice. In particular, interactive affordances such as the "duet" and "stitch" features enabled learners to actively practice correct pronunciation, imitate natural intonation, expand target vocabulary, and gain authentic exposure to diverse World Englishes, including British, American, Indian, and Singaporean accents. Nevertheless, participants encountered notable obstacles, including algorithmic distractions from non-educational entertainment or vulgar content, cognitive difficulty comprehending unfamiliar regional accents, and psychological anxiety or self-conscious awkwardness when recording spoken videos. Crucially, 58% of respondents strongly disagreed with replacing traditional instruction with TikTok, viewing social media strictly as a complementary resource rather than a primary pedagogical method. This study concludes that while TikTok effectively supports autonomous speaking practice, educators must implement clear pedagogical scaffolding, curated account recommendations, and private video submission options to minimize distractions and optimize oral learning outcomes.

Keywords: *TikTok, Students' Perception, Speaking Skills, English Education.*

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INTRODCUTION

Mastering oral communication skills remains one of the most critical yet demanding goals for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Indonesian higher education. Although students receive English instruction for many years from primary school through higher education, many university learners still lack the confidence and fluency needed for spoken interaction. In standard university classrooms, opportunities to develop oral skills are often constrained by large class sizes, limited speaking time, and high levels of speaking anxiety. To overcome these challenges, educators and learners increasingly utilize Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) tools to support accessible, low-stress speaking practice outside regular classroom hours.

Among various digital platforms, TikTok has gained widespread popularity among Generation Z university students as an interactive space for informal learning. In addition to short-form entertainment, the application offers specific participatory functions, most notably the "duet" and "stitch" tools that enable users to respond to video prompts, mirror spoken dialogues, and shadow native and non-native speakers. From a language acquisition perspective, these features are effective because they provide authentic listening input and structured speaking practice in a multimodal format. Developing oral proficiency requires more than memorizing vocabulary; learners need consistent opportunities to practice pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation in realistic communication contexts. Drawing upon Bruner's (1990) cultural psychology framework, language learning occurs through active participation in shared social and communicative practices rather than through passive, mechanical repetition. By allowing students to simulate conversations and exchange short spoken responses, TikTok functions as a digital scaffold that facilitates collaborative meaning-making and helps reduce the affective barriers associated with formal speaking tasks.

A growing body of literature recognizes the pedagogical opportunities offered by TikTok in language education. Recent studies indicate that targeted TikTok speaking activities can measurably enhance EFL learners' oral proficiency (Hongsa et al., 2023) and significantly boost their learning motivation and self-directed practice (Qodarsih et al., 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2023). Complementing these findings, Addinna (2022) revealed that university learners generally hold positive attitudes toward TikTok because its accessible design supports autonomous learning. Furthermore, Xiuwen and Razali (2021) observed that TikTok provides immediate exposure to diverse World Englishes, including British, American, Indian, and Singaporean accents, which broadens students' listening comprehension and socio-pragmatic awareness in global communication.

Despite these shared positive findings, a critical review of the literature reveals notable tensions and challenges. While several researchers emphasize linguistic and motivational gains (Hongsa et al., 2023; Qodarsih et al., 2023), others highlight substantial affective and environmental drawbacks. For instance, Chuah and Ch'ng (2023) reported that undergraduate students often experience noticeable camera anxiety and

embarrassment when recording and sharing spoken video tasks. Additionally, Anggraeni et al. (2023) underscored the risks associated with the platform's open algorithmic feed, where users frequently encounter distracting, irrelevant, or vulgar content that disrupts their educational focus.

Although previous studies have separately examined general motivation, oral performance, and individual affective barriers, several critical research gaps remain unaddressed. Prior literature has not adequately explored how university students navigate the direct friction between interactive features (such as "duet" and "stitch") and the cognitive disruptions caused by algorithmic distractions and video-making anxiety within a dedicated university speaking course. Furthermore, current empirical work overlooks how learners position social media in relation to formal higher education: specifically, whether students perceive short-form video platforms as a viable replacement for classroom instruction or strictly as a supplementary learning aid. Bridging this gap is necessary because the unguided use of social media in tertiary education can lead to instructional mismatch and superficial engagement. Without understanding student experiences with specific app features alongside real-world hurdles, educators cannot design structured, distraction-minimized speaking tasks.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates university students' perceptions of utilizing TikTok as a supplementary speaking tool in the Speaking Class of the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. Specifically, this research examines how interactive features support speaking skills and vocabulary acquisition, identifies the primary psychological and environmental obstacles encountered during learning activities, and clarifies students' perspectives on integrating social media into the formal language curriculum. Through these insights, the study aims to provide practical guidelines for EFL instructors in designing structured, low-anxiety, and pedagogically sound digital speaking activities.

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory mixed-methods design to investigate students' perceptions of using TikTok as a supplementary tool for developing English speaking skills. A mixed-methods approach was selected because it combines the breadth of quantitative survey data with the depth of qualitative interview narratives, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The quantitative phase measured general patterns in students' attitudes, perceived usefulness, and challenges, while the qualitative phase explored their personal experiences, affective reactions, and specific usage habits in greater detail.

The research was conducted within the Speaking Class of the 2024 academic batch in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University, Palu, Indonesia. The study involved 19 university students selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria required participants to be actively enrolled in the speaking course and to have regular experience using TikTok for learning and language practice tasks. For the qualitative phase, 5 participants were selected from the initial group to participate in in-depth, semi-structured interviews based on their varying levels of platform engagement and survey responses.

Data were gathered using two primary instruments; Questionnaire A close-ended questionnaire featuring a 4-point Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was administered to all 19 participants. The questionnaire items covered five main dimensions: perceived ease of use, perceived benefits for speaking skills, attitudes toward traditional vs. digital learning, behavioral intentions, and perceived challenges. Semi-Structured Interviews: Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 selected informants to elicit detailed explanations regarding their speaking experiences, their use of the "duet" and "stitch" features, and their coping mechanisms for platform distractions and camera anxiety.

The collected data were analyzed through complementary quantitative and qualitative procedures. There are Quantitative Analysis, data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics via percentage and frequency distribution calculations to identify overall trends in student responses and Qualitative Analysis, Interview transcripts were examined using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for broader themes, reviewing themes against the transcripts, defining theme labels, and producing narrative interpretations supported by verbatim participant excerpts.

To ensure the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the findings The questionnaire items and interview guides were designed based on established literature and reviewed through expert judgment by senior English language education lecturers to ensure clarity, construct relevance, and alignment with research objectives. Data Triangulation: Methodological triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying quantitative survey responses with qualitative interview excerpts, ensuring that student self-reports were consistently corroborated across instruments. Member Checking: Interview transcripts and summarized interpretations were shared back with the 5 interviewees to confirm the accuracy of their statements and prevent researcher bias during thematic reporting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research results are divided into several thematic areas based on the questionnaires and corroborated by the interview data.

- 1. Ease and Accessibility of Using TikTok** The quantitative data show a widespread positive view of TikTok's ease of entry and straightforward design.

Table 1. Ease and Accessibility of Using TikTok

Themes	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Perceived ease of use	I find TikTok to be accessible for learning English.	42%	47%	11%	0%
	Content on TikTok is easy to follow and understand.	32%	58%	5%	5%

This perspective is supported by the interview data. Informant I01 explained that learning through TikTok is: *"more enjoyable because the presentation is light, and the content is*

short but informative and not boring. And I can understand the content. Also, the content is more varied and can be accessed anytime".

2. **Students' Views on the Benefits of TikTok** Students strongly believe that TikTok contributes to improving their English speaking skills, vocabulary, and understanding of various accents.

Table 2. Students' Views on the Benefits of TikTok

Themes	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Perceived usefulness	TikTok helped me improve my English speaking skills	42%	42%	11%	5%
	I learned new vocabulary through TikTok videos.	53%	42%	0%	5%
	Watching TikTok videos improves my understanding of various English accents	37%	53%	5%	5%

During the interviews, informants provided specific examples of this improvement. I01 noted that TikTok "*provides many examples, like native speakers and non-native speakers speaking in English, from which I can imitate their intonation, their expressions, and their sentence structures*" using the duet and stitch features. I03 added that exposure to different accents was highly beneficial, noting the presence of "*videos from people with different accents, such as British, American, and even Indian accents, like Indian English and Singapore English*".

3. **Students' Feelings and Opinions Toward TikTok** While students enjoy using TikTok, they do not view it as a complete replacement for formal education.

Table 3. Students' Feelings and Opinions Toward TikTok

Themes	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Attitudes toward TikTok	Learning English through TikTok is fun	32%	53%	11%	5%
	I prefer to use TikTok over traditional learning methods for speaking practice	16%	26%	0%	58%

The largest proportion of informants (58%) strongly disagreed with preferring TikTok over traditional methods. Interviewee I01 clarified that she "*doesn't make TikTok my only learning source but rather employs it as a supplement to practice my English speaking skills even better*". Informant I02 affirmed that TikTok is not their primary choice, but acknowledged that "*TikTok can be quite a helpful tool*".

4. **Students' Intentions and Usage Habits** Students intend to recommend the application to others, though individual regular usage plans vary.

Table 4. Students' Intentions and Usage Habits

Themes	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Behavioural Intentions	I intend to recommend TikTok to my friends to learn English	32%	58%	11%	5%

Themes	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	I plan to use TikTok regularly to practice English speaking skill	32%	26%	37%	5%

Informant I01 shared her future plan to: "Continue using TikTok for speaking practice, for example, by following educational accounts, practicing speaking through the duet and stitch features, and trying to make short videos myself so that my speaking skills can continue to develop".

5. **Challenges on Using TikTok** Despite the benefits, learners face significant hurdles related to the platform's content environment and psychological barriers.

Table 5. Challenges on Using TikTok

Themes	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Challenges	I came across inappropriate or distracting content on TikTok that affected my learning	16%	47%	32%	5%
	I have difficulty understanding the various accents or dialects that appear in TikTok videos	11%	42%	37%	11%
	I often feel awkward when creating and sharing TikTok for learning purposes	11%	47%	26%	16%
	The time I spend on TikTok affects my other academic responsibilities	16%	32%	42%	11%

The largest challenge identified was distraction. Informant I02 explained: "The biggest challenge when learning through TikTok is the many distractions from content unrelated to learning. Sometimes I intend to open TikTok to watch learning videos... but over time, what appears are entertainment or funny videos that can make me forget my original goal". They also added that they "often come across videos that are inappropriate or frequently use language that is unsuitable for learning, such as coarse language". Furthermore, an element of awkwardness was reported by 47% of students when creating videos, with students mentioning they might initially "only upload that content for myself" to build confidence.

Discussion

The findings of this study closely align with Bruner's (1990) shift toward cultural psychology, which emphasizes that individuals construct meaning not through passive mechanical responses but through active, culturally mediated interpretation. In this study, university students at Tadulako University do not merely consume digital media passively; they actively participate in a shared online language culture. By utilizing interactive features like duets and stitches, students engage in what Bruner (1990) defines as "folk psychology" a system by which people make sense of their lives, negotiate social settings, and organize their experiences through linguistic and narrative tools. TikTok serves as a modern cultural scaffold where English language learning becomes a collaborative, meaning-making practice rather than a set of isolated grammatical exercises.

The high percentage of students who find TikTok easy to use (89%) and beneficial for their speaking skills (84%) strongly echoes previous Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) literature. Specifically, the effectiveness of the "duet" and "stitch" features for

practicing pronunciation, intonation, and sentence structures mirrors the findings of Hongsa et al. (2023), who demonstrated that TikTok significantly improves EFL students' overall oral English skills. Furthermore, the engaging, light, and short format of the content reported by our informants supports the work of Qodarsih et al. (2023) regarding TikTok's capacity to dramatically enhance student learning motivation.

This motivation stems largely from the platform's unique capacity to offer immediate exposure to a diverse range of authentic English accents (e.g., British, American, Indian, and Singaporean English). This benefit directly aligns with Xiuwen and Razali (2021) regarding the utilization of TikTok to improve communicative competence through real-world linguistic diversity. From the lens of Bruner (1990), interacting with diverse global variations allows students to engage in the "negotiation of meaning," positioning themselves as active participants in a global digital community rather than isolated foreign learners.

However, a critical nuance emerges in the students' attitudes toward the platform. While 85% find learning English through TikTok to be fun, a substantial majority (58%) strongly disagree with preferring TikTok over traditional learning methods. Informants explicitly stated that they view the application purely as a supplement rather than a primary learning source. This nuance provides the missing detail noted in prior literature—showing that despite high motivation on digital apps, students still heavily value the structured, institutional environment of a formal classroom and the human guidance of an instructor to anchor their learning narratives.

Furthermore, this study elaborates on the platform's psychological and environmental hurdles, which are frequently glossed over in purely positive tech-adoption studies. The algorithmic nature of TikTok presents a unique challenge: its feed frequently pushes irrelevant, entertaining, or inappropriate content that can easily derail a student's learning objectives. This pitfall requires immense self-awareness and active cognitive filtering from the learner to protect their educational intent. Additionally, the 47% of students who felt awkward or lacked confidence when creating public videos corroborates the anxiety barriers highlighted by Chuah and Ch'ng (2023). The strategy used by students to combat this—initially keeping video uploads private—serves as a practical coping mechanism for building linguistic and cultural confidence before facing public judgment.

The findings of this research offer several valuable implications for English language pedagogy, particularly within higher education contexts in Indonesia: **Pedagogical Shift to Blended Learning:** Since students strongly reject TikTok as a total replacement for formal education but view it highly as a supplementary tool, educators should adopt a hybrid approach. Traditional speaking instruction can be reinforced by assigning structured TikTok tasks (such as pronunciation drills or dialogue simulations via the duet feature) as homework. **Curriculum-Mediated Content Filtering:** To alleviate the major challenge of algorithmic distraction and exposure to inappropriate content, instructors should curate list recommendations of verified educational accounts and creators. This guides students directly to productive content, minimizing aimless scrolling. **Safe Digital Learning Environments:** To address the psychological barrier of "video-making awkwardness," pedagogical designs should allow students to submit videos privately to the instructor or within a closed peer group rather than forcing immediate public publication on the

platform.

While this study provides deep insights into student perceptions and challenges, certain limitations must be acknowledged: **Sample Size and Scope:** The study was limited to a relatively small sample of 19 questionnaire participants and 5 interview informants from a single batch (2024) at Tadulako University. Consequently, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all university-level EFL students across Indonesia. **Reliance on Self-Reported Data:** The data relies heavily on the students' self-perceptions and self-reported experiences regarding their improvements in vocabulary and speaking skills. The study did not include an objective pre- and post-test measure (such as formal oral proficiency assessments) to quantify the exact linguistic gains achieved through TikTok. **Short-Term Focus:** The research did not account for the long-term sustainability of using TikTok. It remains unclear whether the high motivation and usage habits reported by students are sustained over time or if the educational benefits diminish once the novelty of the application wears off.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that students at Tadulako University hold largely positive perceptions of TikTok as an engaging, easy-to-use supplementary tool for improving speaking skills, vocabulary, and accent comprehension. The interactive features, such as "duet" and "stitch", offer practical language application. However, significant challenges hinder the learning process, primarily distractions from irrelevant/inappropriate content, difficulties comprehending diverse accents, and psychological awkwardness when creating public content.

It is suggested that educators provide clear guidance on finding educational content and integrate structured TikTok activities into the curriculum to build student confidence. Students are encouraged to develop strong time management skills and proactively seek educational accounts to avoid algorithmic distractions. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to measure vocabulary retention and assess how specific TikTok features impact various aspects of speaking proficiency.

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