

Narrative Inquiry: EFL Students' Experiences in Using Tiktok for Basic Speaking at the University Level

Desi Fitria Fajerin

(Mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris FKIP Unisma)

Email: 22001073075@unisma.ac.ai

Abstract: This study explores the potential of TikTok as a tool for learning basic English speaking skill among university students. Given its informal nature and the digital divide, concerns exist about its effectiveness and accessibility. The research, conducted at a private university in Malang, East Java, involved four second-semester English Education students who actively used TikTok. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach and in-depth interviews, the study found that TikTok offers accessibility, engagement, and opportunities for independent learning, helping students improve their speaking skills and confidence. The study concludes that through its educational content and interactive features, TikTok can enhance basic speaking skills for both male and female students. However, it recommends integrating TikTok into language learning curricula and developing suitable assessment methods. Future research could investigate specific TikTok features like duets and live streaming for language acquisition.

Key Words: TikTok, Social media, Basic speaking skills, EFL Student, English language learning, Narrative inquiry, University students.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of basic speaking skills cannot be overstated in English language learning. As Qureshi (2007) emphasizes, "Being an effective communicator requires mastery of speaking abilities, which offers prospects for education and job progress." This assertion underscores the critical role that speaking skills play not only in academic settings but also in professional environments. Developing these skills for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is crucial, as it forms the foundation for effective communication in an increasingly globalized world (Crystal, 2003).

However, EFL students often face significant challenges in developing their speaking skills. Limited exposure to authentic language use, lack of practice opportunities, and anxiety associated with speaking in a foreign language are common hurdles (Horwitz, 2001). Traditional classroom settings, while valuable, may not always provide sufficient opportunities for students to engage in meaningful, context-rich conversations. This gap has led educators and researchers to explore alternative methods and tools to enhance speaking skill development.

In recent years, the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread adoption of social media platforms have opened up new avenues for language learning. These platforms offer unique language exposure, practice, and interaction opportunities beyond traditional classrooms' confines

(Thorne, 2010). Among the various social media platforms, TikTok has emerged as a particularly intriguing tool for language learning, especially for improving speaking skills.

TikTok, a video-sharing platform that allows users to create and share short-form videos on various topics, has gained immense popularity among young adults worldwide. Its user-friendly interface and emphasis on audiovisual content make it an attractive platform for language learners (Zhu et al., 2021). The platform's format encourages users to create and engage with bite-sized content, which aligns well with microlearning principles—a learning strategy that has shown promise in language education (Hug, 2010).

Several studies have begun to explore the potential of TikTok in language learning contexts. For instance, Ferstephanie and Lady Pratiwi (2022) found that using TikTok as a learning platform significantly improved students' speaking abilities, enhancing content delivery, fluency, pronunciation, and nonverbal communication. Similarly, Mandasari et al. (2022) reported that incorporating TikTok into distance learning increased the speaking abilities of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students, particularly in terms of confidence and overall speaking competence.

Despite these promising findings, using TikTok for language learning, particularly for developing basic speaking skills at the university level, remains a relatively unexplored area. Questions persist about its effectiveness as a pedagogical tool, its impact on different aspects of speaking skills, and potential differences in its utility for male and female students. Moreover, concerns have been raised about the platform's informal nature and the potential for reinforcing language stereotypes (Literat, 2021).

These gaps in our understanding and the potential benefits of leveraging popular social media platforms for educational purposes underscore the need for a comprehensive investigation into university students' experiences using TikTok for basic speaking skills. By exploring these experiences, this study aims to contribute to the growing literature on technology-enhanced language learning and provide insights that could inform future pedagogical practices in EFL contexts.

Despite the growing popularity of TikTok as a potential tool for language learning, there is a significant gap in our understanding of its effectiveness, particularly for developing basic speaking skills among university-level EFL students. While some studies have shown promising results in using social media platforms for language education (Himmah et al., 2020; Rusgandi et al., 2019), the specific impact of TikTok on speaking skills remains under researched. Concerns have been raised about its informal nature, the potential reinforcement of language stereotypes, and digital divide issues (Literat, 2021). Moreover, limited research exists on how male and female students might experience and benefit from using TikTok for language learning (Zhu et al., 2021). These issues and the platform's unique features and widespread adoption among young adults highlight the need for a comprehensive investigation into university students' experiences using TikTok for basic speaking skills. This study aims to address this research gap by exploring how TikTok can effectively enhance basic speaking skills for both male and female EFL students at the university

level while also considering potential challenges and limitations of the platform as an educational tool.

This study aims to explore university students' experiences using TikTok to develop basic English speaking skills, focusing on potential differences between male and female learners. The research seeks to investigate how TikTok can effectively enhance basic speaking skills in an EFL context, identifying both the opportunities and challenges presented by this platform. By examining students' interactions with TikTok's language learning content, the study intends to uncover patterns of usage, perceived benefits, and potential drawbacks. Additionally, this research aims to contribute to the existing literature on technology-enhanced language learning, providing insights that could inform future pedagogical practices in EFL contexts, particularly in integrating social media platforms into language curricula.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between popular social media use and formal language education, particularly in the context of developing speaking skills. As educational institutions increasingly seek to leverage digital tools for learning, understanding how students interact with and benefit from platforms like TikTok is crucial. This research could provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum designers, helping them to integrate social media into language learning strategies effectively. Moreover, by exploring potential gender differences in the use and perception of TikTok for language learning, this study contributes to the broader discussion on inclusive educational technology. The findings could inform the development of more tailored and effective language learning approaches that cater to diverse student needs. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the evolving field of digital language pedagogy, potentially influencing how speaking skills are taught and practiced in EFL contexts in the age of social media.

METHOD

This study employs a narrative inquiry approach, a qualitative method well-suited for exploring human experiences, values, beliefs, and social situations (Sudarwati et al., 2022). Narrative inquiry is particularly effective in examining how individuals make meaning of their experiences through stories (Creswell, 2012; Wells, 2011; Ismiatun et al., 2019). This methodology allows the researcher to explore participants' experiences, understand the relationship between TikTok use and basic speaking skills, and build empathetic relationships with participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

The research was conducted at a private university in Malang, East Java. Participants included four second-semester EFL students from the English Education Department: two males (Alex and Gael) and two females (Aleccia and Hanna). All participants had completed two semesters of speaking courses and were active users of the TikTok application, making them suitable for providing relevant experiences for this study.

Data was primarily collected through face-to-face interviews, considered one of the most common and effective methods for obtaining in-depth information on a particular topic (Lune & Berg, 2017). The interviews were conducted in Bahasa, Indonesia, to minimize misunderstandings between the researcher and participants (Ubaidillah et al., 2023).

The data collection procedure involved explaining the research overview to participants, focusing on their experiences with TikTok as a vocabulary and pronunciation learning tool. The researcher used a set of 20 guiding questions during the interviews, covering topics such as TikTok usage, exposure to English content, and perceived benefits for basic speaking skills. Additionally, the researcher collected samples of participants' semester grades to identify those meeting the research standards.

Data analysis followed the six steps of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and read the transcripts multiple times to comprehensively understand the participants' stories.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher selected participants who were active TikTok users and were learning basic speaking vocabulary and pronunciation. To verify the findings, triangulation was employed by combining interviews, observations, and document analysis. The researcher also used verbatim transcription and audio recordings of interviews as evidence. This approach aims to increase understanding of the participants' perspectives rather than identifying an exact truth about social phenomena.

FINDINGS DAN DISCUSSION

The study investigated college students' experiences using TikTok as a tool for learning basic English speaking skills. Four participants - Alex, Gael, Aleccia, and Hanna - were interviewed about their TikTok usage patterns and how they impacted their language learning. The participants became active TikTok users around 2020-2021, initially using the app for entertainment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants' Daily TikTok usage ranged from 5 to 11 hours, with content algorithms tailored to individual interests. All participants reported that English content frequently appeared on their For You Page (FYP). The types of educational content varied, including tips and tricks, tutorials, challenges, and daily life videos.

Vocabulary development emerged as a critical benefit reported by participants. They encountered new words related to hobbies and daily life, which they found helpful in classroom presentations and conversations. Participants found TikTok influential in improving their basic speaking skills, particularly pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. They often practiced immediately after watching videos. The study revealed that participants utilized various TikTok features to practice speaking, including duets, stitches, live streams, and comment sections.

Benefits reported by participants included increased confidence, improved fluency, and expanded vocabulary.

This research uses the TikTok application, a fundamental skill that can enhance students' creativity and communication abilities and improve their understanding and interpretation skills (Herlisya & Wiratno, 2022). The app's frequent use for improving English skills aligns with research by Leong and Ahmadi (2017), emphasizing the importance of meaningful repetition and practice in language learning. TikTok's diverse, short-form content makes it an attractive platform for students to practice speaking skills. The app also aids in correct pronunciation, which is crucial for accuracy and fluency (Parmawati & Inayah, 2019; Derakhshan et al., 2016).

TikTok's features, such as the Duet Video tool, allow users to collaborate with native speakers and content creators, helping learners improve their speaking abilities and confidence. The live streaming feature enables real-time interaction with other users, including native speakers, providing opportunities for natural conversation practice. TikTok's "For You Page" (FYP) algorithm also exposes popular videos to millions of viewers daily. At the same time, tools like "Save Video" and "Add to Favorites" allow users to revisit content for continued learning. These features collectively address students' concerns about making mistakes and provide convenient ways to access and review educational content.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The conclusion of this study reveals that TikTok can be a valuable platform for language learning, particularly in improving basic English speaking skills. The students felt TikTok could be used as a medium to improve their basic speaking skills and gain confidence in speaking. Students' experiences using TikTok as a learning tool varied based on individual interests and usage patterns. However, all participants recognized the potential of this app to improve their speaking skills. Features such as duet videos, educational videos, and TikTok Live allow students to practice, learn from content creators, and interact with native speakers.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that educators consider integrating TikTok into language learning media in the classroom. For example, lecturers can assign students to create short videos in English using the duet or stitch feature. For future research, it is suggested to expand the existing research by focusing on developing specific features of the TikTok application, namely duo, live, and stitch features. Researchers are expected to identify ways to integrate these features into learning strategies and develop appropriate assessment methods to measure their impact on students' language skills.

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The Researcher

Desi Fitria Fajerin

Advisor I,

Advisor II,

Drs. Yahya Alaydrus, M.Pd
NPP. 1930200034

Fitri Awaliyatush Sholihah, S.Pd., M.Pd
NPP. 150605198932221