TikTok Reading Challenge Videos in EFL Speaking Practice

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study explores EFL students' perceptions of using TikTok "Reading Challenge" videos as a medium for speaking practice. Although previous studies have examined TikTok as a platform for speaking activities and learner motivation, limited attention has been given to multimodal tasks that integrate reading and speaking fluency in real time. To address this gap, the present study focuses on students' experiences with Reading Challenge videos that require reading aloud rapidly changing on-screen text. Five English Education students from Tadulako University who had independently engaged in the Reading Challenge participated in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that the Reading Challenge promotes spontaneous engagement and motivation by providing an enjoyable and less formal space for speaking practice. It also supports the development of pronunciation and fluency through focused attention on timing, articulation, and rhythm. In addition, opportunities for repeated practice in a private setting help reduce speaking anxiety and build confidence. However, participants also reported challenges related to maintaining accuracy and comprehension when following fast-moving text. Overall, this study contributes to existing research by highlighting TikTok Reading Challenge videos as a self-directed multimodal practice that bridges reading and speaking skills within Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Social media began as a space for entertainment and has now developed into a significant space for exploring content and understanding materials especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL). One social media platform that has been of interest to teachers and students as a site for practicing English speaking skills is TikTok. The platform's short presentations of content, and its audiovisual content and varied forms of user engagement, create a space that is

helpful for students who feel less comfortable participating in traditional classroom speaking activities (Humairah et al., 2025). This is an illustration of the theory of multimedia learning which suggests that people learn better when they use different senses for the same content such as sound and vision (Mayer, 2009). TikTok is a space where students can learn and practice the same sounds and words through speaking with a model and are encouraged to practice speaking with confidence and fluency (Rahmawati et al., 2023).

TikTok also changes the emotional experience of learning. In many classroom situations, students feel nervous when speaking English in front of others, a phenomenon often associated with Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, the ability to record, edit, and re-record videos in private creates a sense of safety and control. This helps lower the affective filter, which according to Krashen (1982), allows learners to process input more effectively and gain confidence in using the target language. At the same time, when students upload their videos, the possibility of receiving feedback or criticism becomes a digital punishment that motivates them to perform better (Rahmawati et al., 2023). In this way, TikTok functions both as a practice room and as a performance stage that builds confidence through authentic engagement.

Another important finding from recent research comes from Setiawan et al. (2024), who found that students perceived TikTok as an engaging platform for improving their English-speaking skills. They reported that imitating content creators supported their learning of pronunciation and intonation, contributed to their confidence, and supported their fluency development. These findings indicate that audiovisual platforms like TikTok can effectively enhance oral practice and learner motivation in EFL contexts. Similar patterns are also found in studies that focus on TikTok-based speaking activities such as vlogging, where students are given opportunities to plan, rehearse, and perform their oral production before sharing it online (Muzammil et al., 2024).

In addition to pronunciation, TikTok has been shown to promote active participation and engagement in language learning. Ningsih et al. (2023) reported that when teachers used TikTok for guided speaking tasks, students became more motivated and expressive. Humairah et al. (2025) also found that the TikTok algorithm can encourage incidental learning when students explore English content on their own, without requiring formal instructional guidance. These findings support the broader view that TikTok facilitates self-directed learning, in which learners independently select and engage with learning materials based on their interests (Rowiyah et al., 2025).

Although many studies have highlighted the effectiveness of TikTok for speaking and pronunciation practice, most of these studies focus on activities that allow learners to plan, rehearse, and control their oral production, such as vlogging, scripted performances, or guided content creation. These activities emphasize planned speech, where learners have sufficient time to organize

ideas and adjust their performance before sharing it online. In contrast, TikTok Reading Challenge videos represent a different type of language task. In this activity, learners are required to decode written text and produce spoken output simultaneously under time pressure, as the text scrolls or changes rapidly on the screen. This requires real-time processing, attention to accuracy, rhythm, and fluency, and involves a higher level of cognitive demand compared to planned speaking tasks. According to Rasinski (2004), oral reading fluency is more than speed; it also involves accuracy, expression, and rhythm, which are essential for effective oral communication.

However, to date, there is still no research that directly investigates how this type of multimodal and time-constrained task influences learners' fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in EFL contexts. This gap is important because Reading Challenges require learners to process written input and produce spoken output at the same time. The activity connects visual decoding with oral production, fostering comprehension, pronunciation, and fluency in an integrated way. Therefore, Reading Challenges can be viewed as a digital learning practice that bridges receptive and productive skills within one communicative task and offers a new perspective on how multimodal engagement supports oral fluency development in EFL contexts.

While previous studies have primarily offered descriptive insights into students' motivation and speaking improvement through TikTok, they have not explicitly examined how specific multimodal tasks, such as Reading Challenges, involve real-time integration of cognitive linguistic processing and oral production under time constraints. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates EFL students' perceptions of TikTok Reading Challenge videos as a medium for oral practice, focusing on how learners experience this activity, what benefits and difficulties they encounter, and how they perceive its potential contribution to language learning. By situating the analysis within a multimodal and skill integrative framework, this research extends prior descriptive work and highlights the conceptual connection between real-time digital performance and oral fluency development. It also contributes to the growing field of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which emphasizes how mobile technology supports learning beyond traditional classrooms (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Accordingly, this study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions of using TikTok "Reading Challenge" videos as a medium for speaking practice. It seeks to understand how learners experience this activity, what benefits and challenges they encounter, and how it contributes to the development of pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and vocabulary. By examining these perceptions, the study provides insight into how short-form digital videos can bridge reading and speaking skills in an engaging and autonomous learning context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative descriptive design to explore EFL students' perceptions of using TikTok "Reading Challenge" videos as a medium for speaking practice. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to describe participants' experiences in a natural and detailed way rather than through numerical analysis (Creswell, 2012). The research was conducted at the English Education Department of Tadulako University, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, during the even semester of the 2024–2025 academic year.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were: (1) students majoring in English education, (2) active TikTok users who had independently participated in at least one Reading Challenge video, and (3) individuals who engaged in the activity voluntarily, not as part of classroom assignments. The exclusion criteria included students who had never encountered Reading Challenge videos on TikTok or who participated only under teacher supervision. In total, five EFL students met these criteria and were invited to participate in the study. They were chosen because they had firsthand experience engaging with the activity without external instruction or assignment, making their responses more authentic and reflective of genuine learner behavior.

Data were collected through offline semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to express their opinions and reflections freely. Each participant was interviewed individually in a quiet and comfortable setting on campus. The interviews lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes and were conducted in Indonesian to ensure clarity and comfort during communication. With participants' consent, all interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Data collection was carried out on different days for each participant over a three-week period between August and October 2025. Immediately after each interview, the recording was transcribed manually before proceeding to the next participant. This step-by-step process ensured that the researcher could capture details accurately and maintain familiarity with the data during the collection stage.

The transcripts were then organized according to each interview question to facilitate the identification of key ideas and shared meanings. To ensure temporal consistency, the literature reviewed in this study primarily included sources published between 2020 and 2025, representing the most recent discussions on social media-based language learning.

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework was used to analyze and synthesize the data. The steps included: (1) familiarization with the transcripts through repeated reading; (2) generating initial codes to capture meaningful segments related to motivation, fluency, confidence, and vocabulary; (3) collating similar codes into potential themes; (4) reviewing and refining these themes for coherence; (5) defining and naming the

final four themes; and (6) producing the report by integrating participants' quotes with relevant theoretical interpretations. Recurring ideas and shared perspectives were grouped together to represent students' perceptions of using TikTok Reading Challenge videos for speaking practice.

To ensure accuracy, during the interview process the researcher briefly confirmed participants' responses before proceeding to the next question. After completing the interviews, each participant was also asked to reconfirm that their statements had been accurately understood and that no further clarification was needed. This step was carried out to maintain clarity and avoid misinterpretation during data transcription and analysis. The principles of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln et al., 1985) were applied to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Since this research involved only a small number of participants from one department, the findings are not intended for generalization. However, the results provide meaningful insights into how learners perceive the spontaneous use of TikTok Reading Challenge videos as a tool for speaking practice. The study also offers a practical perspective for educators who wish to understand how informal digital experiences can contribute to language learning motivation and performance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the interviews show that TikTok "Reading Challenge" videos are perceived by students as both enjoyable and beneficial for practicing English speaking. All participants explained that they first discovered these videos unintentionally through their TikTok "For You Page." Their curiosity to try came naturally, not because of classroom assignments or imitation of others. One participant explained, "I often follow Reading Challenge videos because they appear on my homepage. I try to read quickly like the videos I see, and I learn new vocabulary from them." This shows that their engagement was initially driven by enjoyment but later developed into a meaningful self-learning activity. This finding supports Humairah et al. (2025), who state that social media can foster autonomous learning through enjoyment. However, the present study extends this by showing that motivation can emerge spontaneously, even without teacher involvement, through curiosity and self-directed exploration, which is consistent with findings reported by Cahyono and Perdhani (2023) regarding students' positive perceptions and intrinsic motivation when engaging with TikTok for language learning. This general positive perception toward TikTok as a helpful medium for developing speaking skills is also in line with Adhani et al. (2023), who found that students

viewed TikTok as beneficial for improving their speaking performance and learning experience.

Most participants stated that the Reading Challenge helped them improve their pronunciation and fluency. They noted that the moving text on the screen required them to focus on timing and articulation while reading aloud. One participant said, "It really helps, especially in improving pronunciation and speaking fluency." Another added, "It was difficult at first because the video moved quickly, but the more I practiced, the more I got used to it and my pronunciation improved." These experiences support Rasinski's (2004) view that fluency includes accuracy, rhythm, and expression rather than speed alone. However, unlike traditional oral reading activities guided by teachers, this task encourages self-regulated performance through visual cues. It allows learners to monitor their own pronunciation and rhythm in real-time, combining visual and verbal input to enhance attention and speech control, which aligns with Suwanda et al. (2024) who reported that TikTok-based speaking practice can support learners' pronunciation accuracy and fluency development.

Participants also expressed that the activity increased their confidence in speaking English. They appreciated the opportunity to practice in a private setting where they could try repeatedly until they were satisfied with the result. One student said, "I became more confident because I already know how to read with the right rhythm and I am braver to speak in front of the class." Another participant commented, "I feel free to express myself, and no one judges me." These statements illustrate how TikTok provides a safe and flexible environment that supports the gradual development of confidence. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of low-anxiety conditions for effective language learning. Yet, unlike the socially oriented informal use of TikTok described by Humairah et al. (2025), the current findings reveal that confidence can also grow through self-directed and private engagement, without external feedback, which is consistent with the findings of Fauzi (2025) who found that TikTok-based speaking activities can reduce anxiety and enhance learners' confidence.

Vocabulary development was also frequently mentioned as a benefit of the activity. Several participants said that they learned new words by watching similar videos repeatedly or by looking up unknown vocabulary. One participant shared, "I found difficult words, so I looked for their meanings and pronunciation in Google Translate and repeated them until I memorized them." Another added, "After I tried one video, TikTok kept showing me more videos like that, and I learned new words." These statements show that participants

used digital tools to support vocabulary learning independently. The algorithmic nature of TikTok appears to support incidental vocabulary learning through repeated exposure to similar linguistic input. Unlike the structured and teacher-designed instructional use of TikTok reported by Ningsih et al. (2023), the present findings suggest that unstructured algorithm-driven engagement can also contribute to vocabulary development, which supports the results reported by Usman et al. (2024) and Pianasari and Faruk (2025) on vocabulary improvement through TikTok use. In this context, learners independently encounter new words and expressions through entertainment-oriented content, which gradually supports vocabulary growth without explicit instructional guidance.

Despite these advantages, participants also faced several challenges while following the Reading Challenge. The most common difficulty was keeping up with the speed of the moving text. One participant said, "Sometimes the text goes too fast, and I cannot catch up, so my pronunciation becomes unclear." Another explained, "I cannot focus on all aspects at once. Usually, I only focus on pronunciation and do not fully understand the meaning." These comments indicate that time pressure and cognitive load influence performance, forcing learners to balance speed, clarity, and comprehension simultaneously. This finding supports Rasinski's (2004) argument that fluency should balance both speed and accuracy. However, the experience also suggests that digital multimodal contexts demand higher levels of visual attention and divided focus compared to traditional oral reading. Thus, teacher guidance and adjusted pacing could help students manage these challenges more effectively if applied in a classroom context.

Finally, participants viewed the Reading Challenge as a flexible and enjoyable way to learn. They appreciated the short duration of TikTok videos and the freedom to practice anytime. One participant said, "I am interested because it is fun. We can practice speaking quietly without pressure and still learn." Another added, "It is not boring, and in a short time I can gain many benefits." These statements show that TikTok promotes a sense of enjoyment and persistence in language learning. The short-form video format maintains attention and encourages repeated practice without fatigue. This finding extends Rahmawati et al. (2023), who emphasized socially driven motivation, by demonstrating that enjoyment can also arise from personal engagement and self-competition, which is also consistent with Cahyono and Perdhani (2023) who highlighted the role of enjoyment and positive perception in sustaining

learners' engagement with TikTok. The sense of achievement and autonomy in this context fosters intrinsic motivation and sustained learning interest.

Overall, the findings indicate that TikTok Reading Challenge videos combine enjoyment, autonomy, and focus in ways that support pronunciation, fluency, confidence, and vocabulary development. While previous studies mainly described TikTok as a socially interactive language-learning platform, this study offers a new perspective by highlighting its role as a self-regulated and cognitively engaging medium. The results suggest that TikTok can bridge reading and speaking skills while providing a psychologically safe and enjoyable learning environment. Informal digital practices such as the Reading Challenge can thus complement formal instruction, giving learners authentic and motivating opportunities to use English naturally and independently.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that TikTok Reading Challenge videos provide EFL students with an engaging and motivating platform for speaking practice. Through interviews with five English education students at Tadulako University, the research found that this activity offers a meaningful and enjoyable way to support oral performance development. Although the participants initially discovered the Reading Challenge unintentionally through their TikTok feed, they later recognized that it provided valuable learning experiences.

The findings revealed four key themes. First, the Reading Challenge encouraged spontaneous engagement and self-directed motivation, allowing students to practice speaking independently through curiosity and enjoyment. Second, the activity improved pronunciation and fluency, as reading aloud while the text moved rapidly on the screen required focused attention on timing and articulation. Third, TikTok created a low-pressure and flexible space that helped students build confidence by allowing repeated practice and self-correction in private settings. Fourth, participants reported that the activity also supported vocabulary learning through repeated exposure to similar content, although they faced challenges balancing speed, accuracy, and comprehension while following fast-moving text.

Overall, the study suggests that TikTok Reading Challenges can function as a complementary medium for practicing speaking in EFL contexts. By integrating reading and speaking practice within a single digital activity, the challenge supports accessible, authentic, and enjoyable language learning. Although the number of participants was limited, their consistent responses indicate that informal and self-directed digital practices can enhance learners' motivation and confidence. Future research may involve a larger group of participants or

further explore how TikTok-based reading and speaking activities could be meaningfully integrated into classroom practice.

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