



## **English Education Students' Perceptions of the Use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge for Improving Speaking Skills (A Case Study on the 8th-Semester Students)**

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**ABSTRACT**

TikTok is a short video-based social media that has recently become very popular and widely used by people worldwide. TikTok can not only be used as an entertainment medium but can also be utilized as a learning medium, including improving speaking skills. This study explores English education students' perception of the use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge to improve speaking skills. Using a qualitative case study research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations of six eighth-semester English education students at Universitas Negeri Semarang. The data obtained were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The results of this study show that the students gave a positive perception. They found it interesting, fun, not boring, flexible, and motivating. It helped them improve their speaking fluency, speed, pronunciation, and confidence. However, the students also faced challenges, including a lack of confidence, difficulty following the fast tempo, slow internet connection, low video quality, and an un conducive environment. Despite its shortcomings, the Speak Fast Challenge shows potential as a learning support tool to improve speaking.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Speaking is one of the essential skills that language learners must acquire in English. According to Smith (2009), speaking is a process in which a person conveys their ideas, intentions, thoughts, and emotions about various situations through spoken language, ensuring that others can understand them. Many experts state that speaking is the most crucial skill for EFL students to master (Adawiyah & Dalimunthe, 2024), especially those majoring in English education. The importance of speaking skills lies in their use as a primary means of communication in daily life. Students who master speaking skills can easily express themselves and communicate effectively in various settings, both casual and formal. Therefore, fair or not, the speaking ability of English education students is often of particular concern, as they study English more intensively and frequently than others. Moreover, Noonan (1991) stated that one's success in learning English is measured by their ability to speak it.

Despite its importance, most language learners still struggle and are unable to communicate effectively in English (Zhang, 2009). Many face challenges in learning to speak, including limited language skills, lack of confidence, insufficient experience, and limited time in speaking classes (Alifia, 2023; Ur, 1996). In addition, learning to speak becomes very complex due to five main components that students must be aware of: (1) vocabulary, (2) pronunciation, (3) grammar, (4) fluency, and (5) comprehension (Brown, 2004).

To overcome the obstacles that hinder the mastery of speaking skills, students cannot rely solely on classroom learning. Instead, they must engage in self-learning by increasing practice and experience to improve their speaking abilities. Therefore, they need flexible and enjoyable learning media. With flexible learning media, students can practice wherever and whenever they choose (Auladdin et al., 2023). Moreover, fun learning is essential for increasing motivation. In this digital era, it is easy to find a platform that provides flexible, engaging, and interactive learning opportunities. One such platform is social media, particularly TikTok.

TikTok is an engaging and interactive social media platform that can serve as a learning tool. This app, which offers short video content, has proven effective in educational contexts, especially for learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Xiuwen and Razali (2021) noted that the engaging features of this app allow students to express themselves creatively and be exposed to real-world English usage. Furthermore, Mitrulescu (2024) and Lin et al. (2022) found that using TikTok as a medium for English language learning, particularly for speaking and vocabulary development, fosters an effective and conducive environment for language practice.

TikTok is currently one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide. According to GilPress (2023), by 2023 TikTok had more than 1.7 billion users globally. Sinta and Zulfritri (2022) also emphasized that TikTok is an audio-visual medium primarily used by students. Its popularity among students, particularly Gen Z, stems from its many attractive features and content. On TikTok, users can create and explore a variety of short videos—ranging from 15 seconds to 10 minutes—such as lip-sync videos, song lyrics, challenges, and more (Novitasari & Addina, 2022). Given TikTok's popularity and diverse content, it can be used as an interactive and communicative medium for language learning.

One type of content, the focus of this study, is challenge content, which is among the most popular formats. This type of content is engaging because users are invited to perform specific tasks or activities that they must replicate or share. Among the various challenges on TikTok is the Speak Fast Challenge—a trending format in which users are challenged to read English texts (e.g., news articles, reminders, or tongue twisters) quickly and accurately. Beyond being a medium for speaking practice, this challenge also serves as entertainment that encourages user interaction (Abbasi, 2020).

Previous studies have highlighted the popularity and effectiveness of TikTok in educational settings. Xiuwen and Razali (2021) found that TikTok fosters interactive language practice, enhancing students' oral communication skills. Ferstephanie and

## English Education Students' Perceptions of the Use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge for Improving Speaking Skills (A Case Study on the 8th-Semester Students)

Pratiwi (2022) suggested that using TikTok in the classroom can improve communication skills. This is due to its engaging features and content—such as challenge formats—which can serve as authentic speaking practice tools and help reduce affective filters in second-language learning (Aranego, 2020). Chuah & Ch'ng (2023) also showed that TikTok voice-over challenges implemented over two months helped improve students' speaking abilities.

Based on these findings, TikTok supports engaging and interactive language learning that enhances students' motivation and speaking skills. It provides opportunities for contextual and socially interactive language learning. However, most previous studies have focused generally on student perceptions of TikTok or the challenges faced in using it. Few studies have specifically explored students' perceptions of using TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge to improve speaking skills.

Addressing this research gap, this study aims to: (1) explore English education students' perceptions of the use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge in improving speaking skills; (2) examine how participation in the Speak Fast Challenge contributes to the enhancement of English education students' speaking abilities; and (3) identify the challenges English education students face while using the Speak Fast Challenge to improve their speaking skills. Furthermore, the study aims to provide insights into how TikTok can be effectively integrated into language learning, offer recommendations for improving speaking skills through social media challenges, and contribute to the development of innovative teaching methods in English education.

## METHODS

### Research Design

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative case study research model to explore the perceptions of 8th-semester English education students regarding the use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge to improve speaking skills. This research design was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic. In line with this, Cresswell (2016) states that a qualitative case study is a research design that requires researchers to conduct in-depth and detailed investigations into a specific object of study, such as events, phenomena, individuals, or groups. Furthermore, this methodology enables researchers to thoroughly investigate and understand the perceptions of each participant, as it is considered effective in providing a holistic understanding of individuals (Rahardjo et al., 2010).

### Research Site and Participants

The participants in this study were six 8th-semester English education students from Universitas Negeri Semarang in the academic year 2025/2026. All participants were female, aged between 21 and 23 years, and possessed Intermediate-level English proficiency (B1–B2) based on the CEFR. The students were selected based on their academic background in speaking. As final-year students, they had generally studied speaking skills comprehensively—from basic to intermediate and advanced levels.

Moreover, they were independent learners who had been exposed to various approaches to speaking, including the use of technology such as social media. Notably, the participants were active TikTok users and frequently engaged in Speak Fast Challenge content.

### Data Collection

The data for this study were obtained from two primary sources: interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deep insights into the students' thoughts, feelings, experiences, and perceptions regarding the use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge for improving speaking skills. The interview consisted of 15 questions and was conducted face-to-face in a relaxed and comfortable setting to ensure that participants felt calm and free from anxiety. These sessions were audio-recorded, with the participants' consent, to support the researcher's understanding and allow for thorough analysis of their responses at any time (Crasswell, 2007).

In addition to the interviews, the researcher also conducted direct observations of the participants during the interview sessions. These observations were documented through field notes and were intended to evaluate the participants' speaking performance. The aim was to assess the perceived impact of the Speak Fast Challenge on their speaking abilities. The specific elements observed included fluency, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension (Brown, 2004), and confidence.

### Data Analysis

For data analysis, this study adopted a qualitative approach using thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006), simplified as per Lochmiller (2021). According to Lochmiller, thematic analysis involves three key steps. The first step is organizing the data, which includes transcribing and structuring the dataset systematically to facilitate the analysis process. The second step involves analyzing the data by coding relevant segments and grouping these codes into emerging themes. The third and final step is interpreting the themes by analyzing them in relation to the research questions and integrating them with relevant literature.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

In this case study, six 8th-semester English education students were interviewed and observed. Table 1 shows the main themes obtained from the interviews, which answers RQ1 regarding English education students' perceptions of using the Speak Fast Challenge to improve speaking skills.

**Table 1. Emerging themes on students' perceptions of the use of TikTok's Speak Fast**

Theme	Participants' Quote
Interesting and fun	"The Speak Fast Challenge is quite <u>fun and interesting</u> ." (P5) "It's <u>more interesting and less boring</u> than exercises from a textbook or even class discussions" (P2)
Not boring	" <u>It's not boring</u> like repeating phrases from a textbook and it feels more interactive and fun." (P5)

## English Education Students' Perceptions of the Use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge for Improving Speaking Skills (A Case Study on the 8th-Semester Students)

Flexible	““The Speak Fast Challenge is more <u>flexible</u> because it can be done anytime” (P1)
Motivating	“ <u>I feel more motivated</u> to practice speaking English after trying this challenge because it is enjoyable and pushed me to speak faster and more fluently.” (P1)

\*(P)=Participant

Based on Table 1 above, the participants showed a positive perception towards the use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge. The students' answers indicated that the Speak Fast Challenge on TikTok has the potential to be used as a medium for learning speaking skills because it is considered interesting, fun, not boring, and flexible. They noted that practicing speaking skills through the Speak Fast Challenge was interesting and fun because they could learn while playing, so it did not feel boring. In addition, after participating in this challenge, students feel more motivated to continue practicing speaking skills.

To answer RQ2, interviews and observations were conducted with the participants to get answers to the investigation on the perceived impact of the Speak Fast Challenge on the development of students' speaking abilities. Table 2 below shows the main themes derived from the interview participants' responses.

**Table 2. Emerging themes on the perceived impact of the Speak Fast Challenge**

Themes	Participants' Quote
Improving speaking Fluency	“Every time I join this challenge, <u>I feel my speaking becomes more fluent</u> and I can correct my performance” (P1) “After regular practice, I feel more comfortable speaking quickly and <u>my fluency has improved noticeably.</u> ”(P3)
Improving speaking speed	“This challenge helps me train my <u>speaking speed</u> ” (P1)
Improving pronunciation	“ <u>Pronunciation also got a little better</u> because I have to mimic the native-like accent from the audio.” (P6) “ <u>My pronunciation also got better</u> because I had to make each word clear even while speaking quickly” (P5)
Increasing self-confidence	“After some consistent practice, I can feel that I speak more smoothly and <u>confidently.</u> ” (P5) “I think my fluency and <u>confidence</u> improved a lot.” (P2)

From the responses given by the six participants, four main impacts of the Speak Fast Challenge on their speaking development were identified. These four impacts include improved speaking fluency, speaking speed, pronunciation, and self-confidence. The participants' statements were also corroborated by the speaking skill observations made during the interview sessions. When answering the interview questions, the students spoke fluently, and their pronunciation was obvious. In addition, the participants'

confidence was also evident from the body gestures and eye contact they made while speaking.

In answering RQ3, the interview answers from the participants were used to identify the challenges students face when engaging with the Speak Fast Challenge to improve their speaking performance. The main themes regarding the challenges the students faced when participating in the Speak Fast Challenge are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Emerging themes on the students' challenges**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Participants' Quote</b>
Lack of self-confidence	<p>"Mostly personal factors, like <u>losing confidence</u> if I can't get it right after several takes, or getting frustrated when I keep stumbling over the words." (P6)</p> <p>"<u>Lack of confidence</u> and difficulty keeping up with the fast tempo." (P2)</p>
Difficulty following the fast tempo	<p>"My challenges are mostly personal, like <u>not being able to follow the tempo</u> or losing focus in the middle of the text." (P5)</p> <p>"Nervousness and <u>difficulty maintaining the tempo</u>." (P3)</p>
Slow internet connection	<p>"<u>Slow internet connection</u> or low-quality screen can make the text blurry or laggy" (P5)</p> <p>"Also, <u>my internet connection can be slow</u>, and that affects how the audio loads." (P6)</p>
Unconducive environment	<p>"Sometimes poor internet connection or a <u>noisy environment</u> makes recording difficult." (P3)</p>
Low video quality	<p>"<u>Low-quality</u> screens can make the text blurry or laggy." (P5)</p>

From the participants' statements, five challenges, both internal and external, were faced when participating in the Speak Fast Challenge. The internal challenges included a lack of confidence in videotaping and difficulty keeping up with the fast tempo. Meanwhile, the external challenges were a slow internet connection, an unconducive environment, and low video quality.

### **English Education Students' Perception of the use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge for Improving Speaking Skills**

From the results of this study, the participants showed a positive perception towards the use of the Speak Fast Challenge to improve speaking skills. The students revealed that the Speak Fast Challenge on TikTok can be considered as a learning medium to improve speaking skills because it is interesting, fun, not boring, flexible, and motivating. This is in line with the results of a study by Putri (2022), which stated that TikTok can be used as a medium to improve students' speaking skills. By participating in the Speak Fast Challenge, the learning process can be done while playing, so it does not cause feelings of boredom. The flexibility of this content also makes it more interesting to use as a medium for practicing speaking skills because it can be done anywhere and anytime by students. In addition, the content also makes students more motivated to practice speaking

## English Education Students' Perceptions of the Use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge for Improving Speaking Skills (A Case Study on the 8th-Semester Students)

skills because they feel constantly challenged to do the Speak Fast Challenge. This is supported by the results of a study by Rahmawati et al. (2023), who mentioned that the game-like nature of the challenge can increase students' motivation to engage in speaking learning activities.

### **The Perceived Impact of the Speak Fast Challenge on the Development of Students' Speaking Abilities**

After repeatedly participating in the Speak Fast Challenge, the students experienced four positive impacts on their speaking skills. These include improving speaking fluency, speaking speed, pronunciation, and self-confidence. Students felt that their speaking fluency and speed improved after doing the challenge. Not only that, some students also noticed an improvement in their pronunciation accuracy. In line with the results of this study, Chen and Lee (2020) in their research have proven that students who frequently engaged in English TikTok content experienced significant improvements in speaking fluency and pronunciation accuracy. In addition, Zaitun et al. (2021) also revealed that TikTok is very effective in improving students' speaking ability and self-confidence.

### **The Challenges Students Face when Engaging with the Speak Fast Challenge**

Based on the results of this study, the students experienced several challenges when using the Speak Fast Challenge on TikTok as a learning medium to improve speaking skills. These challenges include lack of confidence, difficulty following the fast tempo, slow internet connection, unconducive environment, and low video quality. Some students who perceived themselves as introverts admitted they lacked the confidence to record a video while participating in the challenge. Therefore, they preferred to do the challenge without videotaping. In line with this, Hongsa et al. (2023) revealed that students were reluctant to share their videos publicly due to a lack of self-confidence. Students also sometimes find it challenging to keep up with a tempo that is too fast, making them have to try many times. In addition, Novitasari and Addina (2022) reported that students can face significant challenges due to low internet connection and poor video quality. Same as in this study, some students also revealed that slow internet connection and low video quality sometimes frustrate them. Moreover, the non-conducive environment was also challenging when they wanted to record videos during the Speak Fast Challenge.

### **CONCLUSION**

The results of this study show that English education students have a positive perception of the use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge. They perceived the challenge as an interesting, fun, non-boring, flexible, and motivating medium for improving their speaking skills. Through consistent participation in the Speak Fast Challenge, the students experienced noticeable improvements, particularly in speaking fluency, speaking speed, pronunciation accuracy, and confidence.

However, the students also encountered several challenges while participating in the Speak Fast Challenge. These included a lack of confidence to share their videos, difficulty keeping up with the fast pace, slow internet connections, low video quality, and an uncondusive environment. Despite these obstacles, the Speak Fast Challenge demonstrates strong potential as an engaging supplementary tool for speaking practice—especially when supported with pedagogical guidance and learner support features.

In addition, future studies could explore the long-term effects of participating in TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge on students' speaking skills to assess whether the observed improvements are sustained over time.

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English Education Students' Perceptions of the Use of TikTok's Speak Fast Challenge  
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