UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON TIKTOK AS A DIGITAL LEARNING PLATFORM FOR PRONUNCIATION LEARNING

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Abstract

This study explores university students' perceptions on TikTok as a digital learning platform for English pronunciation, considering the increasing role of social media in language education. The research aimed to identify how students perceive the benefits and challenges of using TikTok to enhance pronunciation learning. A qualitative case study design was applied, and the data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with five undergraduate students from the English Language Education Department of a private university in Surabaya. The study revealed three key findings: TikTok is perceived as a flexible and engaging supplementary tool that supports autonomous and enjoyable learning; its visual and repetitive features effectively facilitate observation and imitation of accurate pronunciation; and students maintain critical awareness of content quality, frequently validating information through reliable sources. The study concludes that TikTok provides significant potential as an informal platform for pronunciation development, while also emphasizing the necessity of digital literacy to optimize its educational use.

Keywords: digital learning, language learning, pronunciation, TikTok

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Introduction

Pronunciation is widely recognized as a fundamental component of English language proficiency because it determines intelligibility, facilitates effective communication, and influences

learners' confidence (Derwing & Munro, 2022). In EFL contexts such as Indonesia, many university students continue to struggle with pronunciation accuracy due to limited authentic exposure to spoken English and the lack of consistent opportunities to practice speaking in formal classrooms. When learners experience difficulties in producing comprehensible pronunciation, they may face communication breakdowns, decreased academic performance, and reduced motivation to participate actively in learning. These challenges underline the need for more innovative and accessible approaches to pronunciation practice.

Traditional classroom instruction often provides insufficient emphasis on pronunciation compared to grammar and vocabulary. Time constraints and large class sizes frequently restrict teachers from offering individualized feedback on learners' pronunciation errors. As a result, many students rely on repetitive drills or textbook-based materials, which do not always provide the interactive and engaging practice necessary to develop fluency (Celce-Murcia, 2010). This imbalance has created a pedagogical gap where pronunciation, despite its importance, remains underexplored and underdeveloped within conventional teaching frameworks.

The integration of digital technology has transformed how students learn and practice languages, offering new opportunities for flexibility, autonomy, and multimodal engagement (Susanto & Rifai, 2017). In particular, social media platforms have expanded beyond entertainment to function as informal learning spaces. TikTok, with its short-form video format and interactive features such as duet and lip-sync, provides learners with opportunities to observe, imitate, and rehearse pronunciation in authentic and engaging contexts (Tan et al., 2022). For digital-native students, the platform's accessibility and relatability align well with their everyday learning habits.

Despite its popularity, the educational use of TikTok raises critical concerns. The user-generated nature of the platform means that not all content is accurate or pedagogically sound, which may expose learners to inconsistent models of pronunciation. Prior research has highlighted issues such as distractions, lack of structured guidance, and the potential for misinformation (Fauzi, 2025; Mutiara & Rosari, 2024). Although TikTok has been acknowledged for enhancing engagement and motivation, limited attention has been given to examining how learners critically perceive its effectiveness and limitations as a pronunciation learning tool.

Existing studies on social media and language learning often focus on broader language skills such as speaking, listening, or vocabulary development, while relatively few explore pronunciation in depth. For

example, Rolita and Eryansyah (2025) examined the TikTok duet challenge and reported increased learner enjoyment, yet their study emphasized engagement rather than specific pronunciation outcomes. Similarly, Setiawan et al. (2024) addressed TikTok use in speaking and listening but did not investigate the unique challenges associated with pronunciation learning. These studies reveal a research gap that justifies the present inquiry.

In response to this gap, the present study investigates university students' perceptions of TikTok as a digital platform for English pronunciation learning. The research specifically aims to explore both the benefits and challenges experienced by students when using TikTok for pronunciation practice. The guiding research question is: *What are university students' perceptions on TikTok as a digital learning platform for English pronunciation?*

This study addresses an urgent and contemporary issue in EFL education by examining university students' perceptions of TikTok as a pronunciation learning platform. It highlights the dual nature of social media as both an opportunity and a challenge for language education and underscores the importance of equipping learners with digital literacy skills to critically evaluate and optimize their engagement with informal digital learning environments. In addition, It also addresses issues of learner autonomy and digital literacy, which is increasingly critical in informal learning environments (Zhang & Crompton, 2021). Practically, the study provides insights for educators and curriculum designers to design more adaptive strategies that integrate social media effectively into language learning, while also encouraging students to critically evaluate online content.

Research Methods

Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study approach to gain deeper insights into university students' perceptions of TikTok as a digital learning platform for English pronunciation. According to Creswell & Poth (2017), qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena in their natural settings, while a case study allows the researcher to explore a bounded system in depth. The descriptive nature of the study was intended to portray students' perceptions as they occurred, without manipulating the context (Yin, 2018). Through this design, the researcher was able to investigate how students used TikTok for pronunciation learning and identify both its benefits and challenges.

Participants

The research was conducted in the English Language Education Department of a private university located in Surabaya. The participants were five undergraduate students from a first-year class enrolled in the Phonetics and Pronunciation Practice course, selected through purposive sampling.

Table 1. The information of participants

No.	Name	Gender	Class	Batch
1.	EV	Female	A	2024
2.	NN	Female	A	2024
3.	TA	Female	A	2024
4.	LA	Female	A	2024
5.	MA	Female	A	2024

Purposive sampling, as Patton (2015) explains, enabling researchers to select participants who possess specific knowledge or experiences relevant to the research questions. The inclusion criteria were: (1) students who regularly used TikTok for practicing English pronunciation, and (2) students who were willing to share their learning experiences in interviews. This small and focused sample was chosen to represent learners with relevant experiences and to provide accessible, in-depth data for analysis.

Instrument

The primary research instrument of this study was an interview guide. The interview guide consisted of ten open-ended questions covering three main indicators: students' perceived benefits, challenges, and attitudes toward using TikTok for pronunciation learning. Open-ended questions are particularly valuable because they allow participants to explain their experiences in their own words and provide richer insights (Patton, 2015). To ensure validity and relevance, the questions were developed based on prior studies in digital learning and pronunciation pedagogy and further validated through expert consultation with a lecturer in English language education. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and the data were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy, a process that, according to Lincoln et al. (2011), strengthens the trustworthiness of qualitative research by capturing both explicit responses and nuanced meanings in participants' accounts.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews, a method considered effective for exploring participants'

perceptions in depth because it balances prepared questions with flexibility to pursue emerging insights (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Prior to the interviews, the researcher developed an interview guide, prepared recording tools, and scheduled appointments with participants. Each session was conducted face-to-face at Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, beginning with an explanation of the study's purpose and the acquisition of informed consent to ensure ethical compliance (Creswell & Poth, 2017). During the interview, participants answered ten open-ended questions in a conversational manner, which encouraged them to articulate their ideas freely. The sessions lasted approximately five to seven minutes and were carried out in either English or Indonesian, depending on participants' preference, to promote clarity and depth of responses. To ensure data authenticity, the researcher audio-recorded all interviews and complemented these recordings with field notes to capture verbal details as well as significant non-verbal cues. Yin (2018) emphasizes that systematic documentation through recording and note-taking strengthens the rigor of qualitative research by enabling repeated review and thorough analysis. These combined procedures allowed the researcher to obtain rich, comprehensive, and trustworthy data that served as the basis for subsequent thematic analysis.

Data analysis

The researcher used Thematic Analysis (TA) as the data analysis technique, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step was data familiarization. In this stage, the researcher transcribed and repeatedly read the interview transcripts to gain an overall understanding of the content and noted initial impressions. The second step was coding. The researcher highlighted and labeled meaningful statements that reflected students' perceptions on TikTok in relation to pronunciation learning. These initial codes served as the foundation for identifying significant aspects of the data. After generating codes, the third step was theme generation. The researcher grouped the codes into broader categories, which were then organized into potential themes. During this process, three main themes emerged: TikTok as a supplementary learning tool, TikTok as a pronunciation model, and students' critical awareness of content accuracy. The fourth step was reviewing and refining the themes. As suggested by Braun et al. (2019), this stage ensured internal coherence within themes and distinctiveness between them, making certain that each theme accurately represented the data. Finally, the researcher defined and named the themes, then drew conclusions by connecting the findings to the objectives of the study and the theoretical frameworks. This process allowed the construction of a clear analytical narrative that not only reflected the participants' voices

but also contributed to broader discussions of digital learning and pronunciation development.

Results and Discussion

Results

TikTok as a Flexible and Engaging Supplementary Learning Tool for Pronunciation

The findings reveal that students perceive TikTok as a flexible and engaging media that complements formal classroom instruction in English pronunciation. Participants consistently emphasized the platform's accessibility and autonomy, describing it as a tool that allows them to learn "anytime" and "anywhere," in contrast to the rigid, time-bound structure of traditional education.

> **Extract 1.1**
> *"TikTok is more flexible and faster. I can learn anytime, not necessarily in class"* (S1).

This statement illustrates a broader shift from teacher-centered instruction to self-directed, mobile-assisted learning where students assume greater responsibility for regulating their own learning pace and style.

From a pedagogical perspective, these insights align with the principles of constructivist learning theory, which stress the importance of autonomy, contextual engagement, and learner-centered approaches. The mobility and accessibility of TikTok resonate with the concept of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), in which continuous and dispersed access to resources enhances consistency in language practice (Zhang & Crompton, 2021). The data show that TikTok enables students to engage in short but frequent learning encounters during casual daily moments—such as commuting or relaxing, thereby integrating pronunciation practice into their everyday routines.

> **Extract 1.2**
> *"The content delivery on TikTok is creative and not boring. You can learn pronunciation in a fun way, without the pressure of a formal setting"* (S3).

This demonstrates how entertainment-driven features, or "edutainment," enhance motivation and sustained engagement.

Moreover, the brevity and dynamic style of TikTok content exemplify the pedagogical concept of microlearning, where targeted, digestible learning units prevent cognitive overload and promote retention. As expressed by another student:

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Extract 1.3
"*I can study while relaxing, because the content is interesting and short. It fits well into my daily schedule*" (S5).

This finding underscores the adaptability of TikTok to the learning habits of digital-native students, who favor short, engaging bursts of content that seamlessly fit into fragmented schedules. These observations are consistent with prior studies. Rolita and Eryansyah (2025) found that TikTok's duet feature with music created a more relaxed and enjoyable way to practice pronunciation, supporting the present finding that informal, interactive, and entertaining elements motivate sustained practice. Similarly, Zhang and Crompton (2021) argue that the strength of mobile learning lies in its capacity to provide "anytime, anywhere" access, an aspect that the participants of this study clearly valued. Together, these studies reinforce the conclusion that TikTok is not merely a platform for entertainment but a pedagogically valuable space where formal and informal learning converge.

Taken as a whole, the findings highlight the academic significance of TikTok's role as a supplementary learning tool. While it may not replace structured classroom instruction, it provides unique contributions: flexibility, learner autonomy, and an affective environment conducive to pronunciation practice. Theoretically, these results extend the discourse on digital learning and edutainment by illustrating how learners negotiate the boundaries between formal instruction and informal digital engagement. Practically, the findings suggest that educators should recognize students' informal learning practices and consider integrating mobile, learner-driven platforms like TikTok into pronunciation pedagogy. This integration has the potential to bridge gaps between formal instruction and students' everyday learning habits, ensuring that pronunciation development is both effective and sustainable.

Visual and Repetitive Content Enhances Pronunciation Practice

Another key finding of this study is that students perceived TikTok's visual and repetitive elements as particularly effective for improving pronunciation. Participants noted that features such as close-up visuals of mouth movements, slow-motion playback, and phonetic subtitles made pronunciation clearer and easier to imitate.

Extract 2.1
"*Some videos use slow motion so we can hear pronunciation more clearly. I can play it again and again to mimic the speaker*" (S2).

This illustrates how repetition and learner-controlled pacing contribute to pronunciation accuracy, allowing students to revisit content until they achieve greater mastery.

The effectiveness of these features can be understood through Mayer's (2020) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which emphasizes that learners acquire knowledge more effectively when visual and auditory channels are combined. In the context of pronunciation, this dual coding supports not only auditory discrimination but also articulatory awareness, as students can both hear the sounds and observe how they are physically produced. It reflect the importance of visual cues in forming accurate articulatory habits.

Extract 2.2

"*There are videos where the creator compares wrong and right pronunciation. They use close-up mouth visuals so we can see how the lips and tongue move*" (S3),

Additionally, the repetitive nature of TikTok videos aligns with the principle of deliberate practice in language learning, where consistent and repeated exposure to targeted sounds strengthens phonological awareness. Unlike lengthy classroom drills, TikTok provides short, focused practice sessions that students willingly repeat because of their engaging design. Student responses highlighted how repetition, embedded in microlearning videos, reinforced their ability to notice and reproduce minimal pair distinctions or accent variations.

Beyond accuracy, students also reported that TikTok enhanced their sociolinguistic awareness by exposing them to different accents and expressive styles. For example, one student noted,

Extract 2.3

"*I watched a video comparing American and British pronunciation. It showed facial expressions and how to pronounce words differently*" (S4).

This suggests that TikTok contributes not only to phonological precision but also to intercultural competence, as learners become more adaptable to various forms of spoken English.

TikTok's short, creative, and performance-like videos naturally provide such contexts, enabling learners to see pronunciation as part of communicative practice rather than an isolated drill. Furthermore, Fauziah and Pratolo (2025) argue that peer interaction on social platforms, such as comparing or mimicking others' pronunciation, fosters motivation and reflective awareness, which further deepens learning.

Academically, this theme underscores TikTok's value as a multimodal pronunciation tool. By integrating visual, auditory, and contextual input in short, repetitive sequences, TikTok offers an innovative model of microlearning that is both accessible and pedagogically sound. Theoretically, it extends Mayer's multimodal learning framework into the realm of social media, demonstrating that platforms originally designed for entertainment can facilitate deliberate and meaningful language practice. Practically, these insights point to the need for educators to incorporate multimodal resources into pronunciation teaching, guiding students to use repetition and visual cues strategically for more effective learning outcomes.

The Need for Critical Evaluation of Content Accuracy

The third theme emerging from the data is students' awareness of the importance of critically evaluating the accuracy of pronunciation content on TikTok. While most participants appreciated the platform's flexibility and engaging style, they also expressed caution that not all videos provide correct or standard pronunciation. For instance, one participant stated,

Extract 3.1
"*Sometimes the pronunciation is wrong or mixed with slang. We have to be careful*" (S1).

This highlights that although TikTok offers abundant resources for informal learning, the reliability of content depends heavily on the creator, requiring learners to exercise critical judgment.

Interview data further showed that students often cross-checked pronunciation with other sources, such as online dictionaries or more established learning platforms, when they felt uncertain. One student mentioned,

Extract 3.2
"*I try to double-check pronunciation with online dictionaries or YouTube teachers if I'm not sure*" (S3).

This demonstrates a growing critical awareness among learners to avoid adopting incorrect models. Such awareness reflects their understanding that while TikTok can support pronunciation learning, it should not be relied on as the sole reference.

From an academic perspective, this theme underscores that TikTok functions best as a supplementary learning tool. Its strength lies in motivating students and providing accessible content, but its limitations highlight the necessity of learners' critical awareness. This dual role, both as

a resource and as a space requiring discernment, contributes to broader discussions of how informal digital platforms can complement, rather than replace, formal instruction.

Taken together, the findings of this study demonstrate that TikTok holds significant potential as a supplementary platform for English pronunciation learning. First, its flexibility and engaging format allow students to learn autonomously at their own pace, fostering motivation and reducing the pressures often found in formal classroom settings. Second, the visual and repetitive features of TikTok content, such as mouth-movement demonstrations and short, replayable videos, provide practical support for learners to improve accuracy and fluency in pronunciation practice. These characteristics position TikTok as an accessible and effective resource for integrating pronunciation into daily routines through microlearning. Finally, students' recognition of the need to critically evaluate pronunciation content reflects their awareness of both the strengths and the limitations of the platform. While TikTok offers abundant opportunities for practice, its unregulated nature requires learners to remain selective and cautious in adopting models of pronunciation.

Discussion

Overall, these three themes collectively highlight TikTok's dual role in pronunciation learning: it is a motivating and accessible space that supports learner autonomy and engagement, yet it also demands critical awareness to ensure accuracy and reliability. Academically, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital-assisted language learning by showing how informal platforms like TikTok can complement formal instruction. Practically, the findings suggest that educators and learners should view TikTok as a supportive tool rather than a replacement, integrating its flexible and engaging features while also promoting critical evaluation to maximize its pedagogical value.

Equally significant is the emotional dimension of TikTok-based learning. Students described TikTok as "relaxed," "fun," and "personal," indicating that the platform reduces the anxiety often associated with pronunciation learning in formal classroom settings. This reflects Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition is hindered by negative emotions such as stress or embarrassment. By creating a low-pressure environment, TikTok lowers the affective filter and fosters a psychologically safe space for experimentation.

This resonates with findings by Nasution (2023), who observed that learners improved their articulation when able to combine auditory input

with visual observation of mouth movements. The findings are supported by previous research. Prabaningrat and Akhiriyah (2024) emphasize that embedding pronunciation within meaningful and expressive contexts, such as role-play or storytelling, improves fluency and phonological control.

It is found that the awareness reflects their understanding that while TikTok can support pronunciation learning, it should not be relied on as the sole reference.These findings are consistent with earlier studies included in the review. For example, Fauziah and Pratolo (2025) found that TikTok motivated students to engage in English learning but also required careful evaluation of the information provided, as inaccuracies could influence learning outcomes. Similarly, Prabaningrat and Akhiriyah (2024) emphasized that while social media content is effective in engaging students, teachers need to guide learners in filtering valid information. The present study supports these conclusions, showing that students themselves recognize both the opportunities and the risks of using TikTok for pronunciation practice.

Conclusion

This study revealed that TikTok becomes a flexible and engaging platform to support students' pronunciation learning outside the classroom. The students perceived TikTok as an accessible media that allowed them to learn anytime and anywhere, without being bound by rigid schedules. In addition, the short and entertaining videos reduced the sense of pressure commonly found in formal learning, creating a more relaxed atmosphere that encouraged continuous practice. Furthermore, the visual and repetitive features, such as close-up mouth movements and replay options, provided students with clear models to imitate and repeat until mastery. These findings indicate that TikTok offers practical support for students to integrate pronunciation practice into their daily routines, making language learning more personalized and manageable.

Moreover, the study highlighted students' critical awareness of content accuracy on TikTok. Although they benefited from the platform's flexibility and creativity, they also realized that not all videos provided correct pronunciation models. To overcome this, several students cross-checked information with dictionaries or other trusted sources, showing their ability to use TikTok wisely and selectively. In other words, TikTok was not seen as a replacement for formal instruction but as a supplementary tool that, when combined with learners' critical awareness, could significantly enhance their pronunciation skills.

In sum, the use of TikTok demonstrates how digital platforms can reshape pronunciation learning by combining flexibility, engagement, and accessibility with the need for evaluative judgment. The findings confirm that

informal digital media can complement classroom instruction and motivate learners to take greater responsibility for their learning. Given the rapid development of instructional media, it is essential for educators to guide students in integrating platforms like TikTok into their learning strategies. Therefore, it is suggested for future researchers to examine TikTok or similar applications in fostering not only pronunciation but also other English skills such as speaking, writing, and reading, as well as to investigate their long-term impact on learners' autonomy and performance.

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