

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' USING STRUCTURED TIKTOK-BASED SPEAKING FEATURES AND THEIR LEVEL OF SPEAKING ANXIETY

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ABSTRACT

The growing integration of social media platforms into language learning has encouraged educators and researchers to explore their potential for enhancing students' speaking confidence and reducing anxiety. Among these platforms, TikTok has gained attention for its interactive and multimodal features that appear to offer low-pressure opportunities for oral practice. Despite these assumptions, limited empirical evidence exists regarding whether frequent engagement with TikTok's speaking features is actually associated with measurable affective outcomes. This study therefore examined the relationship between university students' frequency of using TikTok's speaking-related features and their level of speaking anxiety in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 55 students through two Likert-scale questionnaires assessing TikTok usage and speaking anxiety. Descriptive findings indicated moderate levels of both variables. The results showed no significant correlation between students' frequency of using TikTok speaking features and their speaking anxiety ($p = 0.029$, $p = .834$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained, indicating that usage frequency does not significantly predict students' speaking anxiety. These results suggest that frequent engagement with TikTok alone does not contribute to lower speaking anxiety. The study highlights that TikTok's educational benefits depend on purposeful and guided pedagogical use rather than spontaneous, unstructured interaction. Future research is recommended to investigate feature-specific effects, examine the quality of learners' engagement, and incorporate objective assessments of speaking performance.

Keywords: *TikTok, Speaking Anxiety, Frequency of Use, EFL Learners, Digital Speaking Practice.*

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, particularly in the era of digital communication and globalization, English proficiency has become one of the essential competencies that everyone must possess. It is not only a key determinant of academic success but also plays a significant role in professional achievement and social interaction. These factors, though often invisible, compel educational institutions to produce generations who can speak English fluently and spontaneously. In this context, fluency and spontaneity refer to the ability to choose appropriate words and use correct grammar in oral communication, similar to that of native speakers (Asyrofi, Shiddiq; Wati, 2024). Moreover, academic environments often fail to provide sufficient and low-risk spaces for learners to practice and make mistakes, which are fundamentally essential for developing oral fluency. As a result, students' speaking anxiety in English continues to rise, especially when expressing opinions or asking questions to their peers. Most of them feel anxious and afraid to speak up and use English directly in public settings. According to Maher & King (2023), feeling anxiety undermines students' ability to speak confidently and clearly, which often leads to pronunciation errors, unnatural pauses, and reduced clarity when speaking (Mamang et al., 2023). It can also negatively impact learners' oral communication and English proficiency in mastering the language learning. Speaking anxiety arises from the fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and the fear of negative judgment from others. This condition causes students to become passive and avoid speaking activities in the classroom (Le, Yao., 2024).

Consequently, there is an urgent need to integrate innovative media and methodologies capable of simultaneously addressing these psychological barriers and providing engaging,

culturally relevant practice platforms for the current generation of students. The discovery of innovative solutions is crucial for bridging the gap between theoretical linguistic knowledge and practical communicative application. One popular platform widely used by students is TikTok, which has now become not only a source of entertainment but also a means for practicing speaking in an enjoyable context (Fitria, 2023). Studies confirm that speaking is challenging, citing psychological constraints and difficulty finding suitable vocabulary (Leong & Ahmadi, n.d.). A review also highlights various student difficulties (Ork et al., 2024), consistent with the finding that affective factors (anxiety, motivation, self-esteem) substantially impact speaking outcomes (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022). The research focus has increasingly shifted toward mitigating speaking-related challenges through the use of TikTok. (Xiuwen & Razali, 2021) provided a positive overview of TikTok's potential to improve oral competence, while (Zurianti & Efendi, 2025) found that its use positively influences students' speaking accuracy and fluency. Similarly, (Herlisya & Wiratno, 2022) reported significant improvement in speaking performance through classroom action research, and (Rininggayuh et al., 2024), in their systematic review, concluded that TikTok serves as an effective medium for language learning. (Alghameeti, 2022) also highlighted students' positive attitudes, particularly in vocabulary development, and (Diana Sarkila et al., 2024) emphasized that TikTok's interactive and entertaining features foster engagement and motivation in speaking activities.

Previous studies have highlighted the potential of TikTok as a digital platform that can support English speaking practice by increasing learners' motivation, confidence, fluency, and willingness to speak. Several researchers have reported that interactive features on TikTok, such as Duet, Roleplay videos, storytelling prompts, and voice challenges can help reduce learners' fear of negative evaluation and provide low-stakes opportunities for oral practice. For example, Fauziah & Kalisa (2025) found that students perceived TikTok Duet as helpful for lowering speaking anxiety and making speaking practice feel more relaxed and enjoyable. However, their study employed a descriptive qualitative approach and focused solely on learners' perceptions, without providing empirical, quantitative evidence about whether increased use of TikTok features is actually associated with lower levels of speaking anxiety. A broader issue in the existing literature is that most studies highlight the potential benefits of TikTok but rarely examine the strength of the relationship between TikTok usage and learners' speaking anxiety. Research tends to emphasize subjective experiences rather than measurable statistical relationships (Fauziah & Kalisa, 2025). Moreover, while different TikTok features may offer diverse affordances for speaking practice, such as modelling, repetition, imitation, or creative expression. No previous study has quantitatively assessed whether the frequency of using these features is meaningfully correlated with students' speaking anxiety levels in an EFL context. This creates a gap in understanding, although TikTok is widely used and believed to influence affective and linguistic development, the extent of its actual association with speaking performance remains empirically unclear.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the correlation between students' overall frequency of using TikTok speaking-related features and their level of speaking anxiety. Instead of examining each feature separately, this study focuses on students' general engagement with TikTok's speaking affordances as a unified construct, recognizing that learners may combine multiple features in their daily use. By adopting a quantitative correlational design, the study aims to provide empirical statistical evidence on whether higher usage of TikTok for speaking practice is associated with lower anxiety or improved speaking outcomes. The findings from prior studies highlight the perceived potential of social-media platforms to enhance speaking confidence; however, the present research recognizes the need for empirical evidence that clarifies whether such digital engagement is genuinely associated with reductions in speaking anxiety. Accordingly, the literature reviewed in this study aims to provide a more grounded understanding of how social-media-based speaking practices, particularly through platforms like TikTok may influence EFL learners' affective responses and oral performance, while also addressing inconsistencies between learners' subjective perceptions and measurable outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking skills are defined by some as the ability to convey messages orally, which becomes

a crucial and challenging aspect for English as a Foreign Language learners in mastering English language competence. In this competency, learners are required to think critically within a short period of time, arrange and select appropriate vocabulary, and apply grammatical structures and pronunciation spontaneously (Marjonet et al., 2020). Many learners feel that their speaking anxiety is difficult to develop optimally due to several factors identified by researchers, such as limited language exposure, lack of authentic practice, and situational pressure. In addition, feelings of nervousness, embarrassment, and fear of making mistakes when expressing arguments cause some learners to struggle to articulate the ideas in their minds orally (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020). This condition is worsened by emotional anxiety that arises when students are forced to speak English, which is often referred to as Speaking Anxiety. This may occur due to fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and worries about making mistakes, resulting in intense fear accompanied by a choking sensation when attempting to express ideas (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). Such anxiety affects learners' behavior, causing them to withdraw from social situations, experience decreased fluency, and even develop prolonged stress. Therefore, the use of alternative media that can reduce psychological pressure and provide a more comfortable space for practice is highly relevant in today's learning context.

Advancements in digital media and technology have created opportunities for learning environments that are accessible, flexible, interactive, and less intimidating. TikTok, which has become widely discussed, has the potential to shift the position of platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook as foreign language learning media, aligning with this idea. Its short-duration videos, creative formats, interactive features, and ability to imitate or respond directly to content are considered more practical compared to features offered by earlier platforms. Previous studies state that elements of playfulness, ease of use, and time flexibility can increase learners' motivation, engagement, and confidence to practice speaking independently (Annapi et al., 2024). Among the various TikTok features provided for users, the Duet feature receives the most attention for training speaking skills. This feature is designed to imitate dialogues, adjust and match intonation, and practice speaking without having to perform directly in front of others, as users record a video while watching another video in a side-by-side format. Several studies reveal that the Duet feature helps increase self-confidence, improve speaking fluency, and reduce anxiety because users can freely re-record their attempts until they feel satisfied. In addition to Duet, TikTok also offers a roleplay feature in which users focus on practicing conversations with settings that resemble real-life situations, such as in a hotel or at an airport. Such simulations are believed to help learners better understand context while reducing cognitive pressure because they already know which role they need to perform. This feature is considered to have great potential for improving interactional skills and situational understanding (Sholah, 2025).

Furthermore, there is a feature that focuses on practicing how to organize the flow of ideas, structure content, and speak more naturally, known as the Storytelling feature. Learners feel that storytelling helps them relax their mind and reduce anxiety because the activity centres on the story itself rather than on linguistic form. Meanwhile, the anchor feature or script reading like a news presenter allows students to practice pronunciation, intonation, and speaking rhythm in a more structured way. However, this formal format is not always calming. For some learners, reading a script under certain pressure may actually increase anxiety. (Herwanto, 2022).

Overall, the literature suggests that TikTok has the potential to support speaking practice by increasing learners' motivation, confidence, and willingness to speak. Many studies highlight the positive perceptions students hold toward features such as Duet, Roleplay, storytelling prompts, and voice challenges, noting that these tools may create low-stakes environments and reduce fear of negative evaluation. However, most of these studies are limited in scope: they rely heavily on qualitative designs, small participant groups, and subjective self-reports. As a result, the existing evidence remains descriptive rather than explanatory. More importantly, prior research does not quantitatively examine whether the frequency of using TikTok's speaking-related features is actually associated with measurable reductions in speaking anxiety. Although TikTok is widely assumed to improve affective and linguistic outcomes, no empirical study has tested the strength or direction of this relationship using statistical analysis. This lack of quantitative correlational evidence creates a clear gap in the literature. To address this gap, the present study does not analyze individual TikTok

features separately, but instead examines students' overall frequency of engagement with TikTok's speaking affordances as a single construct, acknowledging that learners typically combine multiple features in their natural and self-directed use of the platform. This approach acknowledges that learners naturally combine multiple features in their everyday use. By employing a quantitative correlational design, the study aims to provide objective evidence regarding whether more frequent use of TikTok for speaking practice is genuinely associated with lower speaking anxiety, thereby offering a more grounded and empirically supported understanding of TikTok's role in EFL learners' affective and oral performance.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between students' frequency of using structured TikTok-based speaking features (Variable X) and their level of speaking anxiety (Variable Y). This design was selected to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables without manipulating them. In this study, TikTok usage was not analyzed based on individual features, but was instead conceptualized as students' overall frequency of engagement with TikTok's speaking affordances as a single construct. This operationalization was adopted to reflect learners' natural and self-directed use of the platform, in which multiple speaking-related features are typically used in an integrated and overlapping manner rather than in isolation. By focusing on overall frequency, the study aims to capture general engagement patterns with TikTok-based speaking practice rather than feature-specific behaviors. This technique focuses on obtaining relevant data while minimizing unnecessary sample variation by selecting participants who closely represent the phenomenon being examined (Devi, 2022). The participants of this study were 55 university students from several institutions in Indonesia. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and their responses were collected anonymously. The participants selected through purposive sampling based on the criteria that they had studied English and used TikTok as one of their learning media. In this context, purposive sampling ensured that respondents were relevant and appropriate for testing the correlation between the use of TikTok features for speaking practice and reduced speaking anxiety, allowing the correlation being measured to be valid, clean, and meaningful (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019).

Data were collected using a 1–5 Likert-scale questionnaire created through Google Form, consisting of 9 items measuring the frequency using structured TikTok-based speaking features (Variable X), and an additional 15 items assessing students' level of speaking anxiety (Variable Y). For Variable X, designed to measure students' frequency of using TikTok features for speaking practice, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.90$, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency and confirming that the items coherently represented the construct. The item–total correlation outputs were also reviewed to ensure that no item weakened the scale, and all items were retained because they contributed positively to the overall reliability. For Variable Y, consisting of fifteen items measuring students' speaking anxiety-related indicators, the analysis produced a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.87$, which falls within the range classified as high internal consistency. This result demonstrates that the items functioned cohesively as a unified scale.

Additionally, the alpha-if-item-deleted analysis did not reveal any item that substantially improved the reliability when removed, indicating stable item performance. The data also used to test the Null Hypothesis is There is no significant correlation between the use of structured TikTok-based speaking features and students' level of speaking anxiety. Content validity was established through expert judgment, while construct validity was examined using item–total correlations, and instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (Taber, 2018). The questionnaire was distributed online to eligible respondents, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation tests (Spearman), depending on the normality results, with a significance level of 0.05 (Ike et al., 2022). This approach was selected because it emphasizes information-rich cases that provide the most accurate understanding of the relationship between the use of TikTok features and levels of speaking anxiety.

RESULT

Descriptive Statistics

This study investigated the relationship between the frequency of students' use of TikTok's speaking-related features and their level of speaking anxiety. Descriptive statistics were first analyzed to understand the overall distribution of both variables. As shown in Table 1, students reported moderate engagement with TikTok for speaking practice ($M = 28.58$, $SD = 7.82$), indicating that the majority of participants used TikTok's speaking features occasionally to frequently. Speaking anxiety levels were also in the moderate range ($M = 49.00$, $SD = 9.53$), suggesting that students still experienced noticeable anxiety when required to speak English despite their familiarity with TikTok as a communication tool.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TikTok Usage X	55	10	41	28.58	7.824
Speaking Anxiety Y	55	21	69	49.00	9.532

Students showed a moderately high tendency to engage with TikTok's speaking-related features ($M = 28.58$, $SD = 7.82$). Meanwhile, the overall speaking anxiety scores also indicated mid-to-high levels ($M = 49.00$, $SD = 9.53$).

Correlation Analysis

To examine the relationship between students' frequency of using TikTok speaking-related features and their level of speaking anxiety, a nonparametric correlation analysis was conducted. Spearman's rank-order correlation was selected because the data were obtained from Likert-scale questionnaires and treated conservatively as ordinal data. In addition, the use of a nonparametric test reduces sensitivity to potential deviations from parametric assumptions commonly found in self-reported affective data. The analysis focused on identifying the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables rather than establishing causal effects. The results of the Spearman correlation provided a robust basis for determining whether students' engagement frequency with TikTok speaking features was meaningfully associated with their speaking anxiety levels. As shown in Table 2, the correlation coefficient was 0.029, indicating an extremely weak positive relationship between the two variables. However, the relationship was statistically non-significant ($p = 0.834$), meaning that the frequency with which students used TikTok's speaking features was not associated with changes in speaking anxiety.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Variable	Total Var X	Total Var Y	Interpretation
TikTok Usage (X)	1	0.029 ($p = 0.834$)	No significant correlation
Speaking Anxiety (Y)	0.029 ($p = 0.834$)	1	

These results confirm that the frequency of using TikTok speaking features does not meaningfully influence students' speaking anxiety. The near-zero coefficient shows that TikTok usage explains less than 0.1% of the variation in anxiety, indicating the absence of any practical relationship between both variables.

Hypothesis Testing

- H_0 : There is no significant correlation between the use of structured TikTok-based speaking features and students' level of speaking anxiety.
- Result: H_0 is not rejected ($p = 0.834$).
- Conclusion: There is no significant correlation between the variables.

DISSCUSSION

This study investigated the correlation between students' frequency of using TikTok

speaking-related features and their level of speaking anxiety in an EFL context. The results of the Spearman correlation analysis revealed an extremely weak and non-significant relationship between the two variables ($\rho = 0.029$, $p = 0.834$). This finding indicates that the frequency with which students engage with TikTok speaking features does not meaningfully influence their speaking anxiety levels. To clarify the inferential outcome, the decision of hypothesis testing is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Hypothesis Decision

Hypothesis	Coefficient	Sig. (p-value)	Result
H0: No significant correlation between TikTok usage and speaking anxiety	$\rho = 0.029$	0.834	H0 Cannot Rejected

The acceptance of the null hypothesis suggests that increased engagement with TikTok speaking features is not associated with a reduction in speaking anxiety. This result contrasts with several previous studies that reported positive learner perceptions regarding TikTok use for speaking practice. Prior research has frequently emphasized that TikTok creates a relaxed, enjoyable, and low-pressure environment, particularly through features such as Duet, roleplay, storytelling, and voice challenges. However, most of these studies relied on qualitative designs and self-reported perceptions, rather than empirical statistical analysis. The present findings therefore highlight an important discrepancy between learners' subjective experiences and measurable affective outcomes. One possible explanation for this non-significant relationship lies in the distinction between frequency of use and quality of engagement. While students may use TikTok frequently, such usage does not necessarily involve meaningful speaking practice. In many cases, TikTok engagement is oriented toward entertainment, passive viewing, or short imitative performances that lack communicative depth. Even when speaking-related features are used, the activities are often brief and fragmented, providing limited opportunities for sustained oral production, reflection, or self-regulation. Consequently, frequent use alone may not activate the pedagogical mechanisms required to influence affective variables such as speaking anxiety.

Another important factor is the complex nature of speaking anxiety itself. Speaking anxiety is a multidimensional psychological construct influenced by learners' self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, prior speaking experiences, and social context. Reducing anxiety typically requires repeated exposure to supportive, structured communicative situations in which learners experience success and receive constructive feedback. TikTok usage, when unguided and informal, may not provide the type of structured support necessary to alter these deeper psychological dimensions. As a result, frequent exposure to TikTok does not automatically translate into reduced anxiety levels. Furthermore, TikTok as a social media platform may generate dual affective effects. While its asynchronous nature allows learners to rehearse and control their speech production, the public or semi-public visibility of uploaded videos may also introduce new forms of anxiety. Concerns about peer judgment, negative comments, and comparison with more proficient speakers can increase performance pressure for some learners. These opposing emotional responses, reduced anxiety for some students and increased anxiety for others, may neutralize each other at the group level, resulting in the non-significant correlation observed in this study. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings underscore that TikTok's educational potential is conditional rather than inherent. The platform offers affordances for speaking practice, such as modeling, repetition, and creative expression; however, these affordances require intentional pedagogical mediation to become effective. Without structured tasks, clear learning objectives, guided feedback, and reflective activities, TikTok remains primarily a social and entertainment platform. The acceptance of the null hypothesis thus reinforces the view that technology alone cannot resolve affective barriers

in language learning.

The present findings also help reconcile inconsistencies between this study and earlier qualitative research. While previous studies captured learners' immediate feelings of enjoyment or comfort during TikTok-based activities, such affective states may be temporary and context-specific. Feeling relaxed while recording a TikTok video does not necessarily indicate reduced anxiety in more formal speaking situations, such as classroom presentations or assessments. This suggests that perceived confidence should not be equated with sustained reductions in speaking anxiety. Importantly, the non-significant result should not be interpreted as evidence that TikTok is ineffective for language learning. Rather, it provides a more nuanced understanding of its role in EFL instruction. TikTok may function as a supplementary tool that supports engagement and motivation, but its impact on speaking anxiety depends on how it is integrated into instruction. Teachers who wish to use TikTok for speaking practice should therefore emphasize structured activities, controlled sharing environments, and supportive feedback to maximize its potential benefits.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence that frequency-based engagement with social media platforms does not automatically translate into affective improvement in language learning contexts. By demonstrating the absence of a significant relationship between the frequency of TikTok-based speaking practice and speaking anxiety, the study challenges perception-driven assumptions that often equate frequent digital engagement with reduced anxiety. This finding extends prior research by highlighting the conceptual distinction between usage frequency and pedagogical effectiveness, suggesting that affective outcomes are shaped not by how often learners use digital tools, but by how intentionally and pedagogically those tools are integrated into learning activities. In summary, the integration of Table 3 within the discussion highlights that the acceptance of the null hypothesis is a meaningful empirical outcome. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that frequent use of TikTok speaking features, when detached from pedagogical structure and intentional practice, does not significantly influence students' speaking anxiety. By clarifying the limits of frequency-based engagement, the findings encourage educators and researchers to move beyond simplistic assumptions about digital platforms and to focus instead on the quality and design of technology-mediated speaking activities. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The data relied on self-reported questionnaires, which may be influenced by respondents' subjective perceptions. In addition, the relatively small sample size and the focus on frequency rather than quality of TikTok engagement may limit the generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

This study found no significant correlation between students' frequency of using TikTok's speaking features and their speaking anxiety levels. Although students used TikTok moderately for speaking practice, this frequency did not predict lower anxiety. The result shows that TikTok's impact is not determined by how often it is used, but by how purposefully it is integrated into learning. By providing quantitative correlational evidence, this study clarifies the limits of frequency-based TikTok use in reducing speaking anxiety, thereby addressing an important gap in previous perception-driven research.

Based on this finding, teachers are encouraged to use TikTok in structured speaking tasks, provide guidance and feedback, and allow students to submit videos privately to reduce performance pressure. Developers may also consider creating educational modes that support safer and more focused speaking practice.

Future research should examine how students use TikTok (not just how often), compare the effects of different TikTok features, and include objective speaking assessments. Overall, TikTok can support speaking practice, but meaningful improvements require intentional pedagogical design rather than frequent, unguided use.

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